Contents

1 The Church at Ephesus—September 24-30
2 Ephesians: Themes in Relationships—October 1-7
3 What God Has Done—October 8-14
4 Praise and Prayer—October 15-21
5 The Church: God’s Workmanship—October 22-28
6 The Church Without Walls—October 29–November 4
7 God’s Mystery: The Universal Fellowship—November 5-11
8 Unity Amid Diversity—November 12-18
9 Living the New Life—November 19-25
10 The Christian Walk—November 26–December 2
11 Christian Relationships—December 3-9
12 The Christian Warfare—December 10-16
13 The Christian Armor—December 17-23
14 The Christian Communion and Conduct—December 24-30

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One man at the rear of the church waited in silence. He came late for the service, sat on the floor, listened to the sermon, and took seriously the invitation that all who have accepted Jesus could participate in the open Communion that Adventists celebrate. But he knew no one; no one knew him. He eagerly waited for someone to invite him. But he seemed poor, friendless, and on the wrong side of the caste line. His position seemed desperate to himself and embarrassing to the saints in that small church in a small town in a country where caste still defines community.

Which of the saints would offer to be the partner for this lonely man? Who would rise by stooping? The elders were busy organizing the details. The deacons were busy, fetching water from the only tap outside the church. And others . . . ? Levites and the priests are extremely busy people, not to be disturbed by trivia of this kind.

Suddenly Ravi Anandan went over to the visitor and walked with him to the basin. Ravi knelt on the cold concrete floor, cradled his partner’s shoeless, dusty feet, and washed them in the clear cool water, which instantly turned a muddy brown.

One month ago Ravi would have done no such thing. He would not have allowed even the shadow of that man to come anywhere near him. Touching him would be touching the untouchable, and touching the untouchable is an act of religious impurity and social repugnance.

What happened? One month ago Ravi accepted Jesus. As he studied the New Testament, the image of the broken wall in Ephesians 2:12-16 moved him deeply. Walls or Jesus? It had to be one or the other, not both, for Jesus came to tear down those walls—walls that have caused and still cause so much hatred, misunderstanding, and suffering in this world.
Ravi chose Jesus over those walls of which he was once so proud. The result? He would reach out and touch the untouchable.

That newness, that embrace, that unity in Christ is what makes the Epistle to the Ephesians a gospel of new relationships. It was John Calvin’s favorite letter. William Barclay calls it “the queen of epistles.” E. J. Goodspeed finds it “a great rhapsody of the Christian salvation.”

We can study the Epistle for its theology, ecclesiology, or Christian sociology, but one thing we cannot escape: Paul’s confidence in the new creation God has wrought in Christ and its ultimate triumph in the great controversy. From God’s choice of us from “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) to the battle “against spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Eph. 6:12, NKJV) to the promise that Jesus is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20), the Epistle resonates with the power of grace, prayer, and faith.

And it is with that spirit of prayer, of grace, and of faith that we must approach the study of one of the great love letters of the Bible, the book of Ephesians. It’s our prayer, too, that when done, all who study not only will understand better what motivated Ravi to reach out and touch what he once deemed untouchable but also will experience for themselves the life-changing power of the gospel as it works in their hearts.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the adult standard edition Bible study guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

► **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

► **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

► **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner’s investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly, understand the passage in context, avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

► **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

► **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

*Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it often is possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.*
The Church at Ephesus

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Acts 19, 20:17-38.

Memory Text: “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:20, NKJV).

The Ephesian church was fortunate to have had the ministry of Paul. Imagine—Paul as your minister? What a blessing! It needed a Paul too. The church itself had many enemies, some as ferocious as wild beasts (1 Cor. 15:32), and this explains all the more Paul’s closeness to the Ephesian congregation. No wonder his ministry there was long and arduous, but when he left, he did so with the satisfaction that would be the envy of any pastor: “‘I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God’” (Acts 20:27, NIV).

Among others associated with the church were Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Timothy, and the apostle John. Each of them had a role to play in the building of this church, one of the finest of the first century. What can we learn as we delve into this fascinating and instructive moment in early Christian history?

The Week at a Glance: What kind of culture did Paul face in Ephesus? What really motivated much of the opposition against him? Who were Aquila and Priscilla? What was the secret of Apollos’s power? What was the essence of Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesians?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 1.
Ephesus: Jesus v. Diana (Acts 19:24-29)

Located at the western edge of Asia Minor, with easy access to the Aegean Sea, Ephesus was at the height of its glory in the first and second centuries A.D. The fourth-largest city of the Roman Empire, the capital of Asia Minor, Ephesus boasted of a rich heritage of wealth, philosophy, and Roman law.

Perhaps the most attractive point about the city was its temple of Diana, the goddess of fertility whom “all Asia and the world” worshiped (Acts 19:27). Known as Artemis to the Greeks and Diana to the Romans, the goddess had a cult of followers who practiced magic and astrology; the worship of this figure also brought to the city a flood of worshipers and tourists. Built of marble and lined with gold, her temple measured 324 x 164 feet and held in the center of its inner sanctuary the image of Diana. During Paul’s time the temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the world, and the city’s commerce, industry, and economy depended on the multitudes flocking there to worship Diana.

Into this city, absorbed with the worship of the deity of fertility, entered Paul proclaiming, “they are not gods which are made with hands’” (Acts 19:26, NKJV). In other words, his message struck at the heart of all that these people held dear.

Read Acts 19:24-28. What was the real issue that caused the people to react against the truth as they did?

The conflict between Christ and Diana is as old as the conflict between Christ and Satan. The war is not always about what is right and wrong or about who offers the good life and who does not. The conflict is an appeal to the immediate as opposed to the eternal, to the emotional as opposed to the spiritual, to the pleasures of life as opposed to salvation from sin.

At Ephesus the two stood in confrontation. Paul was on one side, Demetrius on the other, and both were appealing in the name of religion. That raises a point we can forget only at our peril: We confront an Ephesus at every corner, and that includes our own hearts.

Read again the argument made against Paul and his faith. Notice how his opponents justified their opposition so that it appeared their concerns weren’t just about their own livelihood but about something greater than themselves. In what ways do we do the same thing, making excuses for what we do on the pretext of some cause greater than ourselves when, in the end, our real and immediate concern is only ourselves?
Key Text: *Acts 19:20*

Teachers Aims:

1. To acquaint the student with the environment in which Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians.
2. To stress the importance of one’s willingness to grow and learn in the Christian faith.
3. To draw a parallel between the issues and problems that the church in Ephesus faced and those that we as Christians face today.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jesus v. Diana (*Acts 19:34, KJV*)
   A. Paul’s message is profoundly disruptive to the Ephesian way of life.
   B. The goddess Diana, as worshiped by the Ephesians, can be regarded as a symbol of the attractive but empty values that the world offers as the alternative to Christ.
   C. In order to be a Christian, we often must go against our own impulses and even against what appears to be self-interest.

II. The Church at Ephesus (*Acts 18:24-26*)
   A. Then, as now, dedicated laypeople, such as Aquila and Priscilla, are essential in accomplishing the mission of the church.
   B. Apollos, although having plenty of reasons to be arrogant, is willing to accept new knowledge from Aquila and Priscilla.
   C. As Christians, we often must put aside our egos and accept correction from people whom we might regard as inferior to us.

III. Paul and Ephesus (*Eph. 1:1*)
   A. Paul was attached particularly to the church at Ephesus.
   B. Ephesus, as a central point of the Hellenistic world, especially was prone to intellectual fads and false or meaningless doctrinal disputes.
   C. Paul suits his leadership style and parting instructions to the unique situation in Ephesus.

Summary: Unlike many of the other churches to which Paul wrote, Ephesus is in many ways a good example of Christian faith. We can continue to be inspired by the Ephesians’ faithful witness in the midst of a profoundly alien culture and by the dedication of its members.

COMMENTARY

*Ephesus* means “desirable.” Before the gospel reached that city, Ephesus was noted as a center of commerce, as the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, and as a great melting pot of Greek philosophy and Roman philosophy of law. It was also the famous center for its reigning goddess, Diana. But the entry of the gospel of
Ephesus: Aquila and Priscilla

Paul’s first visit to Ephesus was a brief one, at the close of his second missionary journey, en route from Corinth to Antioch on the way to Jerusalem. While in Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla. The three had much in common: They were Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. They had traveled quite a bit—Paul on mission, the couple on business. They were refugees—the couple driven from Rome and Paul from many cities. And they all were tentmakers.

Forged out of necessity, born out of love for Jesus, and burdened with sharing the gospel, the threesome made an effective team ministry. After witnessing in Corinth, the three went to Ephesus (Acts 18:19). There Paul preached his first sermon (as his custom was) to Jews in the local synagogue. His audience was so impressed that they requested him to stay longer, but he declined, promising, “‘I will return . . . God willing’” (vs. 21, NKJV). The apostle must have sensed the potential of Ephesus to become a great Christian center, and so he left Aquila and Priscilla behind. The two faithful laypersons became instrumental in the establishment of the early believers at Ephesus. Later, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (c. A.D. 57) from Ephesus, he sends the Corinthian church greetings from Priscilla and Aquila and the church that met in their house (1 Cor. 16:19). The lay couple and the church at Ephesus have left us a meaningful role model in lay ministry, particularly that of team ministry.

Read the following passages that refer to Aquila and Priscilla: Acts 18:2, 3, 18, 19; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3, 4. From these texts, what can you learn about the characteristics essential for Christian life and ministry?

Aquila and Priscilla were a blessing, not only to the Ephesus church but also to the early missionary movement in that they brought Apollos to the full knowledge of truth (Acts 18:26). Consequently, the early church gained an eloquent, educated, cultured, and fearless preacher in Apollos.

Reread Romans 16:3, 4. How many people would you be willing to risk your life for? For what causes would you endanger your life? Mull over your answers. What conclusions can you draw from them about yourself?
Jesus revealed that all these factors do not contribute to what is truly desirable. During this quarter we will study that which is meaningful and desirable in God’s perspective: a changed life, being restored to a perfect relationship with God and with one another.

Today’s study introduces the city, the beginnings of the church, and Paul’s Epistle to that church.

I. Ephesus, the City of Diana

During Paul’s time, the most significant point about Ephesus was not its wealth, commerce, or learning but its religion. Diana—the goddess of fertility whom “all Asia and the world” worshiped (Acts 19:27)—dominated the city’s life. A cult centered around magic, astrology, and sex—the worship of Diana catered to human pleasures and perversions under the respective garb of religion. The religious phenomenon was matched by the physical grandeur of Diana’s temple overriding the city’s skyline. Built of marble and lined with gold, the temple measured 324 by 164 feet. It was considered one of the seven wonders of the world, attracting the worship of the royalty and the poor, the philosopher and the illiterate.

Into this city came the gospel of Jesus, with Paul proclaiming that “they be no gods, which are made with hands” (Acts 19:26). The gospel polarized the city: between the false god of fertility and the Maker of a “new man” (Eph. 2:15); between Demetrius and the craftsmen who made their living by selling Diana’s silver replicas and Paul, who proclaimed Jesus in whom life took on new meaning and purpose (Acts 19:4, 5).

For us, Ephesus is symbolic of the cosmic challenge of choice that confronts every age, every person: Diana or Jesus? The falsehood of Satan or the truth and life as in Jesus? Until every city and people group that are captives to the allurement of today’s Dianas hear the transforming message of Christ, the work of every modern Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, and Paul must continue.

II. Ephesus: the Beginnings of the Church

After a brief visit during his homeward journey to Jerusalem from the second missionary journey, Paul left his early converts and fellow tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla, in Ephesus to be quiet witnesses for the gospel. This lay couple’s ministry and their faithful teamwork provided a model Christian home church that became the hub of the good news of Jesus and led to the establishment of the first church in Ephesus (Acts 18:2, 3, 18, 19).

Ephesus was also the beneficiary of the ministry of Apollos, a Jew with a Roman name, in itself a symbol that the church of Jesus is a uniting church with no difference between people. Eloquent, learned, and mighty in the Scriptures, Apollos preached “diligently the things of the Lord” (Acts 18:25). So effective was his preaching that Aquila and Priscilla made him their houseguest and filled in
Apollos at Ephesus *(Acts 18:24-28)*

**In this** account, we have a Jew who is named after a Greek god. What’s a subtle but important message for us in this fact? See also Dan. 1:7.

Even before Paul began his full-fledged ministry at Ephesus, the church there was exposed to Apollos, a brilliant orator from Alexandria, the second most important city in the Roman Empire. A Jew from that great center of Greek learning, he was highly cultured and learned in philosophy and rhetoric and knew the Scriptures well *(Acts 18:24)*. But what is culture without conviction? And what is conviction without a passion to persuade others toward what one is convinced about?

**Read** the account of Apollos in Acts 18:24-28. What things are expressed there that reveal why he was so powerful an evangelist?

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Despite all that he had going for him, Aquila and Priscilla detected a deficiency in Apollos’s message. Evidently “he knew only the baptism of John” *(Acts 18:25, NKJV)*, not the baptism of Jesus. The Baptist himself knew the difference: One was of water, the other was of the “‘Holy Spirit and fire’” *(Matt. 3:11, NKJV)*. It is not enough to go through the ritual of baptism. A ritual has no saving power. It is only a symbol of something deeper and greater. John spoke of repentance from sin, and this was only the first step. The whole gospel calls us to repent and believe in Jesus—His death and resurrection—and be transformed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This Apollos did not know, and Aquila and Priscilla “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” *(Acts 18:26, NKJV)*.

The church at Ephesus, thus, early in its beginnings, not only had the benefit of a great scholar expounding the Scriptures but also became the venue of turning this scholar into a true disciple of Christ.

_Apparently, among his other attributes, Apollos was able to receive instruction and correction. Why is being open to correction so important for any Christian? When was the last time someone attempted to correct you on something? How did you respond? How can you learn to accept needed correction better?_
some blanks in his message, one of which was Christ’s gift to the church—the Holy Spirit. Apollos, no doubt, accepted the fullness of the gospel and went on with his work of “publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:28, NKJV). Later, Paul acknowledged the usefulness of Apollos’s ministry by including him with Peter and himself as a faithful sower and nurturer of the gospel seed (1 Cor. 1:12).

Thus, early in its existence, the church at Ephesus became a learning center, a witnessing outlet, and a prime example of unity and love that should exist among believers. This church the risen Jesus “used as a symbol of the entire Christian church in the apostolic age.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 578.

Paul, of course, was primarily responsible for the growth and development of such a thriving center of Christianity in a city divided by political intrigue and prejudices, by struggles between the affluent and the oppressed, and various religious factions. It

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Acts 19; 20:17-38; Ephesians 2:8, 9; 4:8-11; 1 Peter 4:10, 11

1. If you offer your child a piggyback ride now or a brand-new bike tomorrow, which will he or she choose? Why are we drawn to what is close at hand over a more valuable gift soon to come? Review Acts 19:24-41. These verses record the turmoil in the Ephesian church between the message of Jesus Christ and the worship of the goddess Diana. How will you invite God to help you choose what is truly worthwhile? Who needs to hear the story of your choice and its benefits? How will you tell them?

2. Paul records that Aquila and Priscilla “laid down their own necks” (Rom. 16:4) in ministry. Discuss the level of commitment this phrase implies. How did their service bless the people of Ephesus? In what ways are you reaping the benefits of their ministry? Why does God ask us to follow their example? How can you follow their example?

3. It is fun to watch first-graders finally master all 26 letters of the alphabet. They beam with the wonder of having acquired so much knowledge, thinking it is all they will ever need to know. Apollos preached Jesus with “thorough knowledge” and “great fervor” (Acts 18:24, 25, NIV); yet, there was more he needed to learn (vs. 26). Discuss the ways God has reached you with deeper insights about His Word. How can this review prepare you to work with those who need to learn more about the gospel?
Paul at Ephesus  *(Acts 19:1-20)*

During Paul’s third missionary journey he kept the promise he made to the Ephesians *(Acts 18:21)* and returned to the great city where he spent about three years preaching and establishing a strong church. “All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” *(19:10, NKJV)*. Note the phrase *Jews and Greeks*. The church at Ephesus was a mixed congregation that provides the backdrop for the joy and celebration of unity and relationships the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks so much about.

Paul’s ministry in the city began on the right note: bringing the fullness of truth to some of the believers who were already there. As in the case of Apollos, these believers had the baptism of John but not of Jesus and had not even “‘heard whether there is a Holy Spirit’” *(vss. 1-3, NKJV)*. Paul, great teacher that he was, quickly gave them more light, which they readily accepted.

**Paul’s** ministry there, however, did meet with opposition. Thus, even such a great evangelist couldn’t reach all hearts. How did he respond to that opposition? Why do you think he did what he did?

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Despite the obstinacy of some *(vs. 9)*, both Greeks and Jews throughout the province of Asia heard the Lord’s message. Paul taught and preached daily for over two years, and God performed “unusual miracles” through him *(vs. 11, NKJV)*.

Results of Paul’s preaching and healing ministry were astounding. Many believed, confessed their sins, and turned from their past ways of magic and sorcery. The world of the occult was shattered, and the city had a bonfire of incantation books worth several million dollars *(vss. 18, 19)*. Most important of all, the “word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” *(vs. 20, NKJV)*. Even as “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” *(vs. 17, NKJV)*, the city was gripped with fear that “‘Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed’” *(vs. 27, NKJV)*.

Read verses 18 and 19. Look at what their new faith cost these people. What has your faith cost you? Look inside your heart. What do you need to put on the bonfire?
must have taken Paul enormous courage, patience, and, above all, reliance on the One who called him to enter the city with a gospel that was in every way counter to the lifestyle of the proud metropolis (see Acts 19). And yet, he did, and in his third missionary journey, he spent nearly three years building a strong center for Christ, because “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

III. Ephesus: The Epistle

More than any other Epistle Paul wrote, the one to the Ephesians is of great theological and redemptive significance. This Epistle underscores the role of the church in the divine scheme of history, in which all things both in heaven and earth, as participants in the great controversy between God and Satan, move toward an ultimate and triumphal unity in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Nowhere in the Scriptures is this road map of God’s redemptive restoration as clearly set forth as

Witnessing

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exod. 20:3, 5). What could be more clear? Under no circumstances are we to substitute, or replace, God in our lives with some other creation—animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic.

Remember, we lead by example. When we exhibit Christian behaviors in our daily life, we not only reinforce these behaviors for ourselves but also for others who observe us.

Attempt to identify and eliminate anything that takes up so much time it obstructs opportunities to nourish a growing personal relationship with God. Limiting nonspiritually nourishing activities may at first be difficult for both adults and children; but think of the witness to others when word spreads that we choose activities that are physically and spiritually healthy.

Avoid saying anything to anyone that does not reflect Jesus Christ—either in tone or content. Others will quickly notice that you are not one to speak ill of people. Then they may be encouraged to model that same type of behavior the next time they are tempted to gossip or complain.

Finally, become conscious of how envy and jealousy affect those around us. By focusing on worldly possessions or earthly definitions of success, people often lose sight of the ultimate life-time goal and achievement: eternal life. By controlling our own urges when faced with a situation that might invite envy or jealousy, we set an example to others that honors Jesus Christ.

By allowing nothing to replace God in daily living, we are following the biblical mandate to have no other god but Him.
The Depth of Paul’s Ministry (Acts 20:17-38)

After serving in Ephesus for three years, the apostle left on a mission to Macedonia, Greece, and Troas, and then planned his return trip to Jerusalem. The boat’s itinerary included a stop in Miletus, some thirty miles from Ephesus. Paul summoned the Ephesian church elders to Miletus for a farewell fellowship. Of all the churches Paul established and visited, Ephesus was very close and special to him. His depth of love and commitment to that church is seen in the farewell address in Acts 20:18-35.

Note the following about Paul’s ministry and then give a reason why each is important to ministry:

1. His life was as transparent as his ministry (vs. 18).
2. He ministered with heartfelt sincerity (vs. 19).
3. He spoke of the truth both publicly and privately (vs. 20).
4. He had one common message to both Jews and Greeks: faith in Jesus (vs. 21).
5. In his life, service came before self (vss. 24-26).
6. He declared the whole counsel of God (vs. 27).
7. He delegated responsibility for shepherding the flock and warned of the dangers in ministry (vss. 28-31).
8. He believed that the church was purchased by Christ’s own blood (vs. 28).
9. He believed in supporting himself (vss. 33-35).

Paul left the Ephesian church under the stewardship of competent elders (vs. 17). The apostle also appointed Timothy to minister there, with a special commission to ensure that the Ephesians “teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:3, 4, NKJV).

The Ephesian church also had the privilege of the ministry and counsel of the beloved disciple John (see Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 194). The early church father Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130–200) wrote of John’s residence in Ephesus from where he wrote the Gospel (Against Heresies, 2.22.5; 3.1.1). The elderly disciple’s presence itself must have been a source of great strength and joy to the church at Ephesus.

Read prayerfully Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesians in Acts 20:18-35. What points touch you the most? Write out a paragraph on that point or points: what it is, how it touches you, what you have learned from it, and how, if applied, this could better your life and enhance your walk with the Lord.
in Ephesians. Nowhere else does the road map outline the role of all parties involved—the Trinity, the church, and the believer as an individual—in the overthrow of Satan’s diabolic schemes. The theme of the great controversy, crucial to the Seventh-day Adventist theology and mission, finds its fullest expression in the Epistle of Ephesians. Studied from this point of view, the Epistle is more than a theology of redemption, more than a philosophy of history, more than a psychology of Christian living: It is God’s ultimate expression of His will against every conceivable detour.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Take a mental journey around your home. If you were preparing to move and there was limited space on the moving van, what would you choose to take? God sends us on a spiritual journey to reach others. As a class, make a list of what attitudes and skills we should take with us on our travels to reach the lost.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Lewis and Clark explored the North American continent. Marco Polo ventured into the uncharted land of China. They dared to go beyond the margins of the map. Paul established a church in Ephesus. Review the story in Acts 19 and 20:17-38. What do you think motivated him? What opposition did he meet? How is serving God like being asked to be a spiritual explorer for Him?

2. Special miracles of healing accompanied the advance of the gospel (see Acts 19:11). List some of the miracles God has performed in your church family. Then discuss how difficult it was to make this list. How do we miss God’s working in our midst? What other evidences of His presence in our church and its ministry might God be hoping to reveal if we were more willing to dare for Him?

**Application Question:**

When we anticipate a long absence from someone, just before we say Goodbye, we tend to share our deepest thoughts and wishes for her or him. Paul shares his heart and wisdom with the Ephesian church in Acts 20:17-38. What are the elements of this farewell address? Make a list of the advice, encouragement, and warning Paul shared. Choose at least three of the most relevant items; record them on your calendar or in your appointment book. At the end of the week, review how following this counsel was helpful to you. How might Paul’s counsel positively impact the life of your church?
**Further Study:** Read Revelation 2:1-7. Note God’s commendations and warnings to the church at Ephesus. How relevant are these to you and your local church?


“Through their [Priscilla’s and Aquila’s] teachings he [Apollos] obtained a clearer understanding of the Scriptures, and became one of the ablest defenders of the Christian church. Thus a thorough scholar and brilliant orator learned the way of the Lord more perfectly from the teachings of a Christian man and woman whose humble employment was that of tentmaking.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1063.

“The magicians of heathen times have their counterpart in the spiritualistic mediums, the clairvoyants, and the fortunetellers of today. . . . Could the veil be lifted from before our eyes, we should see evil angels employing all their arts to deceive and to destroy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 290.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Every age and individual faces the same struggle: Diana or Christ. What kinds of “Diana” are prevalent in your society? How can you, as a church, help others see clearly the two issues? Also, how can you, as a class, help others within the church not be slowly swept into the worship of “Diana,” in whatever form she comes?

2. Have someone in the class read aloud Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesians in Acts 20:18-35 and then, as a class, discuss whatever comes to your minds about his words.

3. Read again about those who burned all their books (see Wednesday’s lesson). Wasn’t that a little extreme (after all, burning books)? What message can we glean from their actions? Ask people in the class to share their own experiences of having had to “burn” something for the Lord: What was it? Why did they believe they had to do it? Are they sorry or glad they did it?
The Author: Paul

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1).

As Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians, he immediately refers to himself as an “apostle.” In the kind of Greek Paul wrote in, this word carries the idea of being an ambassador, an envoy, or a messenger, certainly an apt title to describe the life and ministry of Paul, who, indeed, had a message to deliver.

In the Gospels, the word apostle is used almost exclusively in reference to the Twelve whom Jesus called and sent out, known, of course, as the Twelve Apostles (see Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, Luke 6:13-16). Though not part of the original Twelve, Paul uses the term here in Ephesians and in numerous other places in reference to himself, because he was sure of his calling.

**How and why does Paul defend his apostolic authority?**

*Acts 26:9-19*

*1 Cor. 9:1, 2*

*Gal. 1:1*

*Gal. 1:11-17*

Paul never had any doubt about his call to apostleship. The Damascus Road experience had a profound effect on him, and it is in that encounter with Jesus that he received his call, chosen as a special vessel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 22:21). From that moment on, he was not his own; he belonged to Jesus. It was God’s will that he be an apostle, an ambassador, a sent one, a messenger of Jesus Christ. It was a calling Paul accepted with all his heart. His life was never the same after that experience. Neither the church nor the world were either.

**Paul had a dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Not many people who are called have had such a dramatic encounter with God. Nevertheless, God still calls people today. How have you experienced God’s call in your life? If someone were to ask you, What has God called you to do? what would you say?**
From the solitude of Caesar's jail, Paul wrote four letters, commonly known as prison Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. The letter to the Ephesians is a concise but comprehensive presentation of the gospel, filled with wonder and awe at the mystery and majesty of unity that God had accomplished.
The Recipients: The Saints in Ephesus

The letter is addressed “to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1, NKJV). The early church almost universally accepted that the Epistle was written to the church at Ephesus, but some important ancient manuscripts omit the phrase “in Ephesus,” and hence the problem of whether the Epistle was originally written to Ephesians. Conservative scholarship generally accepts that the Epistle was addressed to Ephesus as a letter to be circulated among other churches in Asia. That explains why Paul omitted any reference to local persons or problems but, rather, celebrated Christ’s work from a cosmic perspective, embracing God’s work in “heavenly places,” Christ’s work on the cross, and the church’s warfare with “principalities and powers” (Eph. 6:12).

Paul uses the word saints quite frequently in his Epistles. Of the 61 times the word is used in the New Testament, 39 are found in Paul’s writings. Listed below are five such usages. Study each one and note its implication as to the meaning of saints. 1 Cor. 1:2, Eph. 4:12, 5:3, Col. 1:26, Rev. 14:12.

Saint does not refer to any spiritually elite group but, rather, to all believers. It literally means “set apart”—and here, set apart in Christ Jesus to be “faithful” in Him. The common notion that saints are sinless and morally perfect is foreign to the New Testament use of the word. While saints are to “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12), the emphasis is not so much on moral perfection as on faithfulness to Jesus. A saint is a sinner saved by God’s grace.

Also, the saints in Ephesus are “in Christ Jesus.” All those who have accepted Christ have two addresses: in Ephesus and in Christ, in this world and in the world to come.

“A little girl who attended worship in a place with a lot of stained-glass windows was asked what a saint was. ‘A saint is a person the light shines through,’ she replied. A saint is someone whose life—speech, actions, attitudes, relationships—points to Jesus.”—Life Application Bible Commentary: Ephesians (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996), p. 4. How well have your actions or words in the past day pointed to Jesus? If you could do something over, what would it be?
through Christ. This week’s lesson speaks of the author, the recipients, and the message of the Epistle.

I. The Epistle: Its Author

The author is identified right at the outset: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (Eph. 1:1). Only since the nineteenth century has the Epistle’s authorship been questioned, and that is because of the Epistle’s vocabulary, its impersonal nature, and its resemblance to the book of Colossians.

True, Ephesians has some seventy Greek words not found in any other Pauline letter, but who are we to limit the mind of a genius such as Paul in using new words and expressions, particularly when he was writing without the pressures of travel and work? True, also, is the fact that Paul does not mention anyone by name except Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), and this is strange because the apostle had spent nearly three years in Ephesus and must have made many friends. But then, is it possible that Paul viewed that the Epistle’s content deserved a wider audience, and he wanted the letter to be circulated to several churches that surrounded Ephesus?

Yes, Ephesians and Colossians have much in common: Some fifty-five verses are almost the same. This commonness need not lead to the conclusion that someone else used Colossians to come up with Ephesians. Instead, why not see just the opposite: a common author? Who could that be other than Paul, who announced himself as the author (Eph. 1:1) and described his status as a prisoner (Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20)?

Besides authorship, Paul affirms his authority to write such a profound Epistle: He is “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (Eph. 1:1). Though not one of the original Twelve, Paul laid claim to apostleship, not because of self-exaltation but because of the Damascus Road experience in which the risen Jesus personally called him for a special task: “a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15; see also Acts 22:21). Paul did not seek to be an apostle; but God chose him. And as an apostle “by the will of God,” he wrote this Epistle.

II. The Epistle: Its Recipients

The Epistle was addressed “to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). Note three things about the Ephesian believers. First, they are saints. Church history and tradition have often warped the meaning of the word saint to suggest that a saint is a special person able to do things that other believers cannot. In the original New Testament usage, saint simply means “separated from,” “set apart” for a special purpose—in this case, set apart for Jesus, set apart for holiness. The latter does not imply sinlessness or moral perfection but faithfulness to Jesus.
Grace and Peace

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:2, NKJV).

Paul used “grace . . . and peace” as part of his customary greeting in most of his Epistles (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Phil. 1:2, Col. 1:2, etc.). The word for “grace” used here is distinct from the common Greek form of greeting, which generally expresses a wish for health and prosperity. Instead of greeting his readers with a call for health and good wishes, Paul employed a word for “grace” that was beginning to acquire a new meaning in Christian faith, emphasizing God’s unmerited favor toward sinners. It is through God’s initiative and love alone that anyone can be saved from sin, a thought Paul will later emphasize: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8, NKJV).

In addition to grace, Paul wished for his readers “peace.” The death and resurrection of Christ brought new meaning to the idea of “peace” and opened wide doors of new experience and relationship between humans and God, and among humans themselves. Read the following verses: John 14:27; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14, 15; 6:15. How do you understand the concept of “peace” expressed here?

The death and resurrection of Christ brought new meaning to the idea of “peace” and opened wide doors of new experience and relationship between humans and God, and among humans themselves. Read the following verses: John 14:27; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14, 15; 6:15. How do you understand the concept of “peace” expressed here?

The source of both grace and peace are “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:2, NKJV). The verse places Christ and the Father in a position of equality, thus recognizing the divinity of Jesus. Without Jesus, God’s grace could not have been made manifest to humanity; nor could peace between God and sinners have been possible. Hence, the focus of the Epistle is on what God has done in Christ. He is our redemption. We are saved because of His grace. He is our peace. He is the basis of our new relationship with the Lord.

What has been your own experience of God’s peace? How does it differ from the kind of peace you find only in the world? What might you need to do in order to better know and experience the kind of peace God offers us?
A saint is a sinner saved by God's grace. Paul seems to shout out the believer’s privilege and duty in Christ: *Every Christian is a saint! And every Christian's vocation is holiness.*

Second, believers are faithful. Being faithful to Jesus and His way is nonnegotiable in the Christian life and teaching. It is an absolute concept of all or nothing. One cannot be faithful in some areas of life and be the opposite in other areas. A genuine Christian is one who believes in Christ and is believable and trustworthy.

Third, the believers are in Christ. This expression, key to the entire Epistle, appears in the very first verse. It is impossible to be a saint or a faithful believer without being in Christ. That is the ultimate residence of every Christian, regardless of other addresses one may have. It is not important whether one lives in Ephesus or Calcutta or Shanghai or New York or Lima. But it is crucial that one lives in Christ. To be in Christ is to accept Him as the final focus of life, work, worship, and hope.

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Acts 26:9-19; Galatians 1:11-17; Ephesians 3:11, 12; Colossians 1:20, 21; Revelation 12:7

1 When your mother called you home for supper, most of the time you likely came running. God calls people to salvation and service. For Paul, this call was a dramatic encounter with Jesus that knocked him to the ground and, for a time, left him blind (*Acts 26:13, 14*). Why is God so abrupt with some and so gentle with others? Discuss why both types of experience are valid. Ask class members to share their conversion story.

2 Mysteries invite exploration in order to discover their secrets. Paul continually presents the profound mystery of unity as reflected in Christ and, potentially, in us. Read Ephesians 1:9, 10 in as many translations as your class members have. Discuss the impact unity is to have on Christ’s remnant church. What attitudes prevent unity? What attitudes foster unity? How is it possible for sinful humans to acquire the attitudes that foster unity?

3 People store their valuable items in cedar chests, jewelry boxes, fireproof safes, and safety-deposit boxes. Our brains, the center of our personalities and intelligence, are “stored” in our heads. God has “blessed us... with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (*Eph. 1:3, NIV*). How can we personally and completely be in Christ? How would you describe the benefits of an in-Christ experience to a friend or neighbor?
The Theme: Unity

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9, 10, RSV).

Read the above two verses. Notice the basic theme there: unity. Whom does the Lord plan to unify? How does your understanding of the great controversy, including the fall of Lucifer and humanity, help you understand the need for this unity? See Isa. 14:12; Col. 1:20, 21; Rev. 12:7.

In these two verses, Paul sets forth unity as the central theme of the Epistle. “He was writing to a church . . . consisting of Jews and Gentiles, Asiatics and Europeans, slaves and freemen—all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity in Christ. This would necessitate unity of person, family, church, and . . . unity of God’s universe.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 995.

Paul’s concept of unity has two dimensions. The first is dealing with the church, in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in one body. The second is universal, in which all things in heaven and earth move toward an ultimate unity in Christ.

The source, the motive, and the means of this unity among humans and in the universe must not be located in human needs and ability or in any evolutionary or historic or mechanical process in nature. The book of Ephesians points to a higher and surer way. It talks about ultimate unity in the universe in the mind and will of God. All things move in accordance with “His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself” (Eph. 1:9, NKJV).

A small replica of that universal unity, Paul tells the Ephesians, must be seen now and here in the Christian church.

Why is unity in the church so important? What happens when there are disunity, discord, and dissension? Who is hurt? What is impacted? In what practical ways can you, as an individual, promote an atmosphere of unity in the church?
III. The Epistle: Its Message

Ephesians 1:2 provides an introduction and a summary to the basic message of the Epistle: “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Grace and peace may be seen as words of customary greetings, but nothing from the apostle’s pen is just incidental. The Pauline usage of grace lays the foundation of his understanding of the gospel. The good news of salvation is a result of God’s free, saving initiative through the life and ministry of Jesus and the fact that no one can be saved except through acceptance of that gracious provision (Eph. 2:8, 9). God’s grace became operative in the heavenly places long before sin began, and it is on the basis of this grace that God has accepted us as His children (Eph. 1:4-7).

Witnessing

God’s remnant church is blessed with dynamic, spirit-filled preachers who, like the apostle Paul, are able to prepare the most stubborn of hearts to receive the Holy Spirit. Many precious souls have been won to Jesus through the efforts of ministers and evangelists who have responded to God’s call.

Others, however, have been led to Christ through less formal methods. Often, Christ’s most effective missionaries live quiet lifestyles according to God’s Word and, by daily example, reveal to those around them His love, compassion, and way of life. How do the children of God reveal His character to others? One way is by sharing their spiritual gifts that He has bestowed.

The gift of hospitality pours out kindness and warmth to others at all times, but especially when someone is alone or in personal need. Whether it is inviting a stranger from church into one’s home for Sabbath dinner, bringing the daily newspaper and mail to the elderly widow down the street, or planning a surprise birthday party for a neighbor’s eight-year-old, the sharing of one’s time in a loving and cheerful way mirrors Christ’s own approach to people when He was here on earth.

Individuals who are blessed with the ability to establish nurturing learning environments, whether in formal classroom settings, Sabbath School rooms, Pathfinder meetings, or inner-city tutoring sessions, have the opportunity to not only positively influence children’s earthly environment but help prepare them for the new earth. What greater gift is there than leading a young life, through actions and words, to Jesus Christ?

Touching lives through personal (often unobtrusive) contact is how Jesus would have others learn of Him. Not everyone can be mighty preachers in His name; but all believers can model daily His method of reaching people through ministering to physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.
The Key: “In Christ”

“In Christ” and its variations appear some two hundred times in Paul’s writings. In Ephesians, it is a key phrase that demonstrates the depth of Paul’s understanding of what God has accomplished for us and the fallen universe through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. “In Christ,” along with “in Him” and “in whom,” appears more than thirty times in the Epistle. A majority of these references are used in a way that shows that God’s eternal purposes in Creation, history, redemption, and restoration are worked out through Christ. He is the key to everything we have from God.

Thus, Paul not only recognizes the significance of Christ in His incarnate mission but boldly affirms that apart from Christ we would have no salvation, no adoption, no forgiveness of sin, no access to God, no revelation of His love, no church, no cosmic restoration, and no future. Thus, in every way Ephesians is a Christ-centered Epistle: It is a hymn to Jesus, without whom we would be “aliens” and “strangers” (Eph. 2:12).

**According to the following texts, what has been accomplished for us “in Christ”?** 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:7, 10, 11; 3:11, 12; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:10.

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Everything we have, or can hope for, as Christians, we can find only “in Christ.” He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. That’s why we owe Him everything; that’s why He must come first in our lives; that’s why we must surrender our wills to Him; that’s why it’s so unpardonable to reject Him and what He is to us, for by rejecting Him we reject life itself.

Because Christ is all-important and all-sufficient, He must have the central place in our lives. Our homes, our work, our values, and our worship must have Him as the focus. “In Christ” God has made all things possible.

“Christ in us” makes that possibility a reality. What practical changes do you need to make in your personal life to keep God central and in focus?
If grace is the operative mode of God toward us, Ephesians insists that peace is a result of that operation. To those of us alienated from God, Jesus Himself is our peace by making that peace possible through His Cross (Eph. 2:15). Hence, His gospel is a gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), a gospel that built and healed all broken relationships between God and humans, among humans themselves, between Jews and Gentiles, between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between masters and slaves.

What better summary of the message of Ephesians can we find than this: In Christ Jesus all things have become possible. The Lord Jesus Christ—the reconciling and unifying ministry of His grace and the resultant relationship of peace—dominates the Epistle through and through.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Did you have a dress-up box at home when you were little? In it might have been clothes, hats, and shoes so you could pretend to be a princess or a cowboy, a scientist or a plumber. Share who your favorite dress-up character was. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:11, 12 that his calling and message were not “made up” or “from any man” (NIV). He was not playing dress-up. Why is it important that the origins of our message and mission be from God? How does this origin empower and compel our ministry to others?

Thought Question:

Stories awaken and captivate our imagination, involving us in another person’s life. Paul shares his personal conversion story in Acts 26:9-19. Consider the impact of Paul’s witness. What is your personal testimony? If you recorded it in an article, picture, song, or poem, how might it impact others? What hinders us from sharing? Ask God to give you courage to tell your story to a close friend this week.

Application Question:

What happens when a high-ranking government official comes to your town? What protocols and procedures are imposed both for their safety and to symbolize respect? A major theme of Paul’s message is God’s provision for us to approach Him. What hinders us from going to Him with “freedom and confidence”? (Eph. 3:12, NIV). How can God help us change busyness and restraint to intentionality and anticipation? Covenant with God to spend daily time with Him, seeking the answers to this question.
Further Study: Paul’s apostleship. “Paul ably vindicated his position as an apostle of Christ. He declared himself to be an apostle, ‘not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.’ Not from men, but from the highest Authority in heaven, had he received his commission. And his position had been acknowledged by a general council at Jerusalem, with the decisions of which Paul had complied in all his labors among the Gentiles.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 387.

Unity. “When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 678.

Christ’s work. “Through Christ’s redeeming work the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan’s charges are refuted, and his character unveiled. Rebellion can never again arise. Sin can never again enter the universe. Through eternal ages all are secure from apostasy. By love’s self-sacrifice, the inhabitants of earth and heaven are bound to their Creator in bonds of indissoluble union.”—Page 26.

Discussion Questions:

1. What can you say to someone who says, “I gave my heart to Christ, I have accepted His atoning death in my behalf, and I seek to obey Him to the best of my God-given ability, but I still feel no peace”?

2. Are there any issues dividing your local church? If so, what can you do, as a class, to help foster unity?

3. As a class, go back over the verses listed in Thursday’s lesson about what has been done for us “in Christ.” Have each person pick one aspect that means the most to them and explain why they deem it so important.
LESSON 3  *October 8-14*

What God Has Done

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 8:15, 16; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.

Memory Text: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7, NKJV).

Praise and petition. In the original Greek, Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence through which the apostle introduces major aspects of Christian theology, including the idea that the Godhead was involved in the formation of the church—God’s family on earth. God the Father “chose us in Him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world” (vs. 4, NKJV). It is in Christ that “we have redemption through His blood” (vs. 7, NKJV). Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit provides us security and guarantees our eternal inheritance (vss. 13, 14).

Paul recognizes that while God acts in history and time, He dwells in “heavenly places.” The phrase occurs five times in Ephesians in connection with where our blessings come from (vs. 3), where the risen Christ is seated (vs. 20), where we, too, will be seated (2:6), where God’s purposes will be made known because of the church (3:10), and where originated the powers of darkness with which we must struggle (6:12).

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible mean by the idea of predestination? According to Ephesians, what has God done for us in Christ? What does Paul mean by “adoption”? How has Christ redeemed us?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 15.*
The Chosen

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4).

Paul traces the origin of the church in the mind of God (Eph. 1:4, 5). God’s plan of redemption and His plan for the redeemed are not accidental; they were conceived before creation, before time began. God formed a purpose in His mind: to choose us in Christ. Even before we existed, God saw us through a relationship with Christ, and because of that He could make us His children. Hence, we are not saved by anything we are or do. We did not influence God; we could not work our way to God. In fact, when we were not in existence, He already purposed our salvation, so that when we came around, all we would need to do is accept what Christ offers.

How do the following texts help us understand this idea of predestination? 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4, 5; 3:11; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8.

A lot of people get confused over the idea that God chose us beforehand to be saved, because it implies that some people were chosen beforehand to be lost. But that’s not the biblical teaching. Instead, God prepared beforehand the plan of salvation, according to His eternal purpose, in order that everyone would be saved (1 Tim. 2:6, 2 Pet. 3:9). The plan of salvation itself, which included every human being, was determined before the world began; what was not determined beforehand was what our individual responses to that plan would be. That God knows beforehand that our eternal destiny is not the same as saying He predetermined that destiny. Salvation has been offered to us because of what Christ has done for us, a plan worked out for us even before we were created. The only question is, How do we respond?

God chose beforehand that you should be saved; that is, His original plan was for you to be with Him forever in a new heaven and a new earth. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for this wonderful hope and what it means to you. Share it with the class on Sabbath.
**Key Text:** Ephesians 1:4

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To stress that God’s plan for our salvation existed even before we did.
2. To emphasize the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice to our salvation.
3. To understand that Christ’s salvation is available to all.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Chosen by God** *(Eph. 1:4-6)*
   A. God knew us and wanted us in His kingdom from the beginning.
   B. God’s decision to save His creation is not arbitrary but stems from His nature.
   C. We are predestined for salvation, not destruction.

II. **Redeeming Blood** *(Eph. 1:7)*
   A. Sin comes at a cost, and redemption for sin also comes at a cost.
   B. Sin leads to death, so in order for sin to be erased, a death must take place.
   C. Normally, it would be the sinner who dies for his or her sin. Christ has taken that death on Himself.

III. **One Body** *(Eph. 1:22, 23)*
   A. God’s ultimate plan is to unite all creation in Himself.
   B. As a foretaste of this, He brought all peoples together in His church.
   C. It is the Holy Spirit that unites all these people together in the one body of Christ, the church.

**Summary:** Before we existed, God knew and loved us. He had a plan that would enable us to know and love Him in return. That plan is what we see in the ministry of Christ and His sacrifice for us on the cross. God’s plan is the logical result of His nature and goodness. As Christians, we are to communicate our knowledge of God’s character to the world that doesn’t know Him.

**COMMENTARY**

In Greek, Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence through which Paul offers a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. The doxology provides a panoramic, cosmic perspective of the plan of redemption: in heaven, on earth, and at the end of time.

I. **Redemption: Planned in Heaven**

Paul’s praise and thanksgiving begin where every believer’s day must begin and end: with an acknowledgment that God is the reason for our status as members of His family. He “blessed us” *(Eph. 1:3)*, “hath chosen us” *(vs. 4)*, “predestinated us unto the adoption of children” *(vs. 5)*, “made us accepted” *(vs. 6)*, and called us as instruments of “praise of His glory” *(vs. 12, NKJV).*

To which god is Paul referring at a time when there were, as
Praise God for Adopting Us (Eph. 1:4-6)

**Read** Ephesians 1:4-6. What are the three things God does for us as depicted in these verses?

- **Verse 4**

- **Verse 5**

- **Verse 6**

The church had its roots in the mind of God when He conceived the plan of salvation before the creation of the world. But who would form the church? Who would be participants of the family of God? Paul has already given a partial answer in Ephesians 1:4—those who were chosen in Christ to be “holy and without blame” and walk in love. “Chosen in Christ” does not indicate any arbitrary choice on the part of God but an acknowledgment of the divine provision, which provided salvation for the whole world but made it effective only to those who claimed it for themselves.

Salvation and eternal life are made available to all as a gift of God in Jesus (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8, 9), but only “whoever believes in Him” shall be saved. The universal nature of the gift is predestined. The contingent nature of the gift is determined by the choice of “whoever.” Paul adds an additional thought: Those who accept God’s redemptive provision in Jesus are “predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 2:5, NKJV). Again, it’s not that God chose some and rejected others; instead, it’s that those who have accepted what Christ has done for them have simply fulfilled what was originally planned for them from the start.

**Notice** the emphasis on the idea of adoption (vs. 5). Why would Paul use such a term to describe what God has done for us? See also Rom. 8:15, 16; Gal. 3:26-29; 4:5.

God’s church is made up of adopted children. Natural children are orphans and prodigals—outside the family of God because of their sin and by their own choice to be in rebellion against God. But when they accept God’s predestined provision, they are adopted into God’s family. The relationship now becomes a family relationship, a relationship founded on love.

**Think of someone you love. How does that relationship help you understand what your relationship with God, your adopted Father, should be?**
today, “gods many, and lords many” (1 Cor. 8:5)? Not the Dianas of mythology. Not the refined gods of philosophy attractively packaged, such as the unmoved mover of Aristotle, the idea of the good of Plato, or the first principle of the intellectuals of all ages. Paul is speaking of the God who dwells “in heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3) but acted in history and space in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (vs. 59). He is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and hence our Father “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ” (Eph. 1:3, NKJV). He is also the God who has sealed us “with that holy Spirit of promise” (vs. 13).

Thus, the Christian confession of Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is at the core of the Christian rejoicing and thanksgiving for the salvation we experience. Without that confession in praise and prayer, our experience is meaningless and has no starting point.

II. Redemption: Executed on Earth

It is God’s activity on our behalf that moved Paul to pour out his heart in this magnificent expression of praise and thanksgiving. That activity is seen in the apostle’s usage of several words sprinkled throughout the doxology: chosen, predestinated, and adoption; redemption, forgiveness, and inheritance guaranteed and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

First, chosen, predestinated, and adoption. The apostle argues that God’s choosing us is not an afterthought. He had chosen us “in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). The key to God’s choice of us is “in him”—in Christ. “In the councils of heaven, before the world was created, the Father and the Son covenanted together that if man proved disloyal to God, Christ, one with the Father, would take the place of the transgressor, and suffer the penalty of justice that must fall upon him.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1070.

Through Jesus, God has chosen us and predestined us for adoption as His children. The biblical teaching of predestination does not mean that God has arbitrarily determined some would be saved and others would be lost. Predestination means that it is God’s will that salvation be available to all, but God does not determine who will accept that salvation and who will not. Acceptance is entirely dependent on human choice (John 3:16; see also 2 Pet. 3:9). That acceptance leads to adoption as children of God’s family (Rom. 8:13, 14; Eph. 2:5).

Second, redemption, forgiveness, and inheritance. The three words belong together and center around God’s activity on the cross. God’s adoption of us as His children is dependent on His redemptive plan carried out through His Son on the cross. Paul is precise and does not dillydally as to how our redemption is obtained. Our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus shed on
Redemption in Christ *(Eph. 1:7, 8)*

**According** to Ephesians 1:7, 8, through what do we have redemption?

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**Can** there be salvation for any of us without blood? *See Heb. 9:22.*

Redemption means deliverance of a slave through payment of a price. In the Scriptures, redemption means God’s provision in Christ to save us from the bondage of sin. The shedding of Christ’s blood on the cross for our sins has made possible not only the forgiveness of sin but also redemption and adoption into the family of God *(Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:7, 8).* Without Christ, none of these would have been possible.

Forgiveness of sin is free for us; indeed, we cannot put a price on it or pay for it. But forgiveness on the part of God cost Him much: the blood of Jesus. Sin by its very nature brings death; where a sinner ought to die, a substitutionary death was necessary. In the Old Testament sanctuary system God provided forgiveness on the basis of shedding an animal’s blood. The whole sacrificial system anticipated the day when Christ, “the lamb of God,” would take away the sins of the world *(John 1:29).* Jesus on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. His shed blood makes forgiveness of sins possible *(Rom. 5:8, 9; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:20).*

Our redemption and adoption are made possible by the Cross, which was “in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us” *(Eph. 1:7, 8, NIV).* Paul uses the word *riches* six times in Ephesians *(1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16).* We may be poor and destitute in many ways, but we are bountifully rich in God’s grace. We are free from the guilt of sin.

Someone asked a wealthy industrialist how much more would satisfy him. “Always a little more,” the multimillionaire replied. Ask a Christian, and the answer will be: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” *(Phil. 4:19, NKJV).*

“Grace is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God. He is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who stands in the courts of heaven as the sinner’s substitute and surety.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 398. Memorize this Ellen White quote; it will come in handy, especially when you feel discouraged or in doubt about your salvation.
the cross. Without that shed blood, without a sinless Savior dying for the sins of the world, there is no forgiveness and no redemption (Heb. 9:22). Jesus’ blood paid the penalty for our sins. When we accept that substitutionary death, our sins are forgiven, and we become eligible for the heavenly inheritance, sealed and made sure by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Take away the Cross, and we have no forgiveness, no salvation, no promise, and no sealing of the Spirit.

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Romans 8:15, 16; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 5:6-13

1. When we take tests in school, we often do not know the answers the teacher requires before she or he distributes the test. Christ invites us to give Him the answer He wants in response to His offer of salvation. He prepared for salvation even before He created us. How does Romans 8:29, 30 help us understand the concept of predestination? What prevents us, our neighbors, and our work associates from choosing the response God wants?

2. In our culture, adoption is an alternate route if a couple cannot conceive. In the heavenly realm, adoption is not an alternate choice but God’s first choice. Have class members share what this means to them personally. How would you use Romans 8:15, 16 and Galatians 3:26-29 to describe heavenly adoption to a child or an acquaintance who does not understand that God values them?

3. “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near” (Eph. 2:13, NIV). Discuss what it is like to be far away from God. Describe the difference between alienation from God and having a saving relationship with Him. Pray with your class for God to provide you all with opportunities to share your personal redemption stories this week with someone who really needs to hear about God’s salvation.

4. Imagine the sound of the siren on an emergency-response vehicle speeding to the site of an accident. What thoughts race through your mind? “God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency.” —Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 22. Why was it so critical that God should respond to our sin crisis? How does knowing that He prepared for our rescue (predestined our salvation) before sin occurred give you a mission for today and hope for the future?
The Mystery (Eph. 1:9-12)

Read Ephesians 1:9-12. Notice how many times in these few verses Paul talks about God’s will or purpose being fulfilled. Add them with how many times that same idea is found in the first eight verses of the chapter. How does this idea, that of God’s purposes being fulfilled for us, help you learn to trust Him?

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God’s people have much to praise Him for: election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and acceptance. Today’s lesson adds one more: a great mystery that God has “made known to us . . . according to His good pleasure” (vs. 9, NKJV).

Paul uses the word mystery six times in Ephesians. The Greek term has two meanings: first, something secret and known only to a select few; second, something formerly hidden but now revealed by God. It is in the second sense Paul uses the word.

What is this “mystery” of the will of God that Paul talks about in Ephesians 1:9-12?

Ephesians 3 identifies it as God’s plan to bring Jews and Gentiles into one fellowship; that is, to create a common humanity without any divisions: a church without walls. But there is another dimension to this mystery. What Christ has accomplished through the Cross by bringing the Jew and Gentile into one body is only a foretaste of what God has “set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9,10, RSV). Just as in “the fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4, NKJV) God sent His Son to redeem and unite the Jew and the Gentile, so He has a plan to unite “all things in [Him]” (Eph. 1:10, NKJV) in the fullness of time—that is, when Christ comes the second time.

“This is the divine purpose—the restoration of a lost unity. It must necessarily be in Christ, because He is the center of all things. . . . The unity of God’s universe had been broken by sin. The mystery of God’s will was His plan to restore this unity when the occasion was ready, a restoration to be accomplished through Christ. That mystery will find its culmination at the end of the great controversy, when all things in heaven and on earth will be united in Christ, and the character of the Godhead will have been vindicated.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1000.
III. God’s Eschatological Purpose

Paul’s thanksgiving and praise are not only for what God has done in heavenly places or for what He accomplished through His Son in the earthly theater on the cross but also for what He will do in the future. That is, He will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:10). Christian theology is incomplete without a conclusive eschatology. That means that the great controversy between God and Satan that caused disunity and conflict in heaven will finally see its fitting end—when all things will be united so that “one pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

With the destruction of sin (Satan and the unrepentant sinners), the cosmic conflict will give way to cosmic unity. All created order

Witnessing

*Bigotry. Prejudice. Intolerance. Hatred.* These are emotionally charged and inflammatory words. Words that wound. Words that cut deeply into hearts and souls. Words that describe injustice to humanity. Words that should *never* linger on the tongues or reside in the hearts and minds of God’s children.

Breaking down barriers, leveling the playing field, equalizing it all is what inclusion in God’s remnant church brings to each member. Nurturing one another, uplifting one another, and loving one another *because of* (and not *in spite of*) our unique qualities and dissimilarities are the blending processes brought on by the mutual belief that each of us is God’s child and special in His sight.

Two thousand years ago, the apostle Peter said, “‘Now I know it’s true that God doesn’t respect one person more than another. Anyone who loves Him and does what is right, He accepts as part of His people, no matter what nationality or race he or she belongs to’” (Acts 10:34, 35, *The Clear Word*). The unity found within God’s remnant church crosses all perceived racial, gender, age, and socioeconomic barriers. In a world torn apart by such separations, what a light we can, and must, be! How needed is our message of personhood in Christ!

Those around us watch carefully; they see when we practice what we preach and when we fail miserably. Our example can often be the clarifying moment for someone teetering on the edge of positive behavioral change. How we eliminate barriers that artificially separate people comes under close scrutiny by those who wish to discredit our Lord and His church. We have an awesome responsibility to live our lives in such clear terms that those around us will have no doubt we are an *inclusive* body of believers—a body of believers where there is room for all.
Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 1:11-14)

In Ephesians 1:11-13, Paul presents an example of the new unity Christ brings between Jews and Gentiles. He uses the words we and you—“we have obtained an inheritance” (vs. 11, NKJV); “we who first trusted in Christ” (vs. 12, NKJV); “you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth” (vs. 13, NKJV). The “we” refers to Jewish Christians with whom Paul identifies himself, and “you” refers to Gentile Christians.

In what sense were Jews first? God chose them first to be His inheritance (Deut. 4:20, 9:29, Zech. 2:12). To them were given “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2, NKJV). To them the gospel was preached first (Rom. 1:16), and, hence, the first to believe in the gospel were the Jews (John 1:11, 8:31, Acts 1:8, 3:26).

By saying Jews were the first, however, Paul does not attribute any superiority to Jewish Christians. Indeed, he says in Ephesians 1:13, “You [Gentile Christians] also trusted” (NKJV) and the Holy Spirit has become the guarantee of “our [both Jews and Gentiles] inheritance” (vs. 14).

In God’s kingdom, knowing Christ or coming to Christ first does not provide any special status. The point is not when we accepted the gospel but whether we remain true to its claims.

Paul reinforces the certainty of our inheritance by referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, to whom he gives three designations. First, He is the Spirit of promise. God promised the Spirit through Jesus to everyone who repents and believes (Luke 24:49; Gal. 3:14, 16). Second, the Spirit is God’s seal. A seal is a sign of ownership and authenticity. God makes the Spirit to dwell within us as a sign that we are His (see also Rom. 8:14-17, 2 Cor. 1:22). Third, the Spirit is God’s guarantee. The word guarantee is also translated “a deposit,” “a pledge.” Through the Spirit, God has made a deposit, a pledge, that He will fulfill all His promises to both Jews and Gentiles to “the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:14, NKJV).

Though the exact experience of salvation varies from individual to individual, verses 13, 14 speak of three basic steps. Read through them and write down the processes as expressed there. In what ways have they reflected your own experience? In what ways was your own experience different? Is there anything you can do, or change, to deepen or enrich this experience? If so, what?

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and the redeemed of the earth will hail the One who brought about the great victory and unity: “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Rev. 5:13).

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** As a child, were you ever given the opportunity to choose one puppy out of a litter? How did you decide which one would go home with you? Paul tells us we were chosen by God (Eph. 1:4). On what did God base His decision? How is God’s method of selection based on different criteria than human choices? Why is this such good news?

**Thought Questions:**

1. “The whole world . . . followed the beast” (Rev. 13:3, NIV). Why would anyone follow a beast, much less the one described in Revelation 13? Discuss the great-controversy theme in your Sabbath School class. Why did God reveal this concept to humanity? How does this knowledge help us? If some of your work associates are following “the beast,” how can you redirect them to the Savior, using His methods of reaching people?

2. Even before our children are born, we make plans for them. We think of colleges we would like them to attend so they can be successful in a respected profession. God predestined us to adoption (see Eph. 1:5). How do we alter God’s purpose for us? Why is it important to make a daily decision to be in Christ? Have class members share why they are thankful for the plans God has for them.

**Application Question:**

How do you begin letters (or emails) to close friends? Paul begins Ephesians with this salutation: “Praise be to the God . . . who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3, NIV). Reread Ephesians 1:3-14. Make a list of the blessings God desires to give us. What impact does it have on you knowing that God wants to bless you even though He has full knowledge of who you are? Design a worship service for your church in which your congregation can praise God for the good things He has “lavished on” us (Eph. 1:8, NIV). Talk with the pastor about when your class could present this program.
Further Study: “Before the foundations of the world.” “The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R. V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. . . . God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

God’s predestination. “In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God, predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. God wills that all men should be saved. . . . Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1114.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have people read aloud the prayers of thanksgiving and praise they wrote in response to Sunday’s lesson. What have you learned from each other?

2. Imagine what it must be like to be an orphan who is adopted into a loving, caring family that loves that orphan as much as it would a natural family member. How does that analogy help you (a) understand God’s love for you and (b) how you should treat your brothers and sisters in the Lord?

3. Discuss what you can do, as a class, to help someone in your church—maybe a new member or someone really discouraged or the young people—understand what it means to be part of God’s family.
Praise and Prayer

Read for This Week’s Study: Luke 1:37; Eph. 1:15-23; Col. 4:5; James 2:20, 26; 3:13, 17.

Memory Text: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (Ephesians 1:22, NIV).

Praise and prayer. Paul was a man who had many struggles, many trials, many griefs; but he was also a man of praise and prayer. Thus, after recounting in the earlier verses the wonderful things God has done for us in Christ, he then gives thanks to God for the faith of the church in Ephesus because, as he said, he has heard, not only of their faith but of their “love unto all the saints” (Eph. 1:15). He then tells about the prayer of intercession he makes in behalf of the Ephesians.

So often we tend to think of prayer only for those who are in bad shape, those who really need prayer; but here we have Paul praying for those who, apparently, are doing very well. The lesson for us, of course, is to take nothing for granted: Whether people we know are thriving in their faith or barely hanging on, prayer needs to be offered in their behalf.

Meanwhile, Paul’s prayer of intercession gives us greater insight into what God has done for us in Christ and the great hope that’s ours as a result.

The Week at a Glance: What was the spiritual state of the church at Ephesus? How is love related to faith for the Christian? How do we obtain knowledge of God? How does Paul describe God’s power?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 22.
Faith and Love

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15, 16, NKJV).

The Greek word for “therefore” can also be translated “for this reason” (NIV). For the reason of “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3, NKJV), with which God has blessed the church at Ephesus, Paul bursts forth in thanksgiving. These blessings, as we saw last week, include election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, unity in Christ, and the ultimate restoration of all creation to its original purpose (vss. 3-14).

Christian thanksgiving goes beyond merely being thankful. Thanksgiving must lead to a life that reflects and shares God’s blessings in active, meaningful, and day-to-day living. With the Ephesians, that seemed to be the case. They were Christians who lived their profession. Indeed, while jailed, Paul heard about their “faith in the Lord Jesus” and “love for all the saints” (vss. 15, 16, NKJV). To them Christianity was more than a system of beliefs; it was a call to transformed living and dynamic relationship. If faith leads to belief, belief must lead to action. For faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), and “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20, 26).

How would you tie in this idea of “love for all saints” with the notion that “faith without works is dead”? How are faith and love related?

The faith of the Ephesians was a living faith. They believed in the risen Christ and confessed that through Him God has acted for the forgiveness and salvation of humankind. But faith is more than belief, more than mere intellectual assent. Faith is also the spiritual quality of being faithful, and the Ephesian church was faithful and loyal to Christ and His claims. Their faith in Jesus had its natural outcome: “love for all the saints” (vs. 15)—both Jews and Gentiles.

Love, faith, and hope are the basic graces that mark the Christian life (1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4, 5). However orthodox our doctrines, however laudable our worship and witness, and however faithful our stewardship, we cannot be Christians until we are marked by a double love—love to God, love to people. Is this not the commandment Jesus gave (Matt. 22:37-39)? Is it possible to love God and not to love His people? (See 1 John 4:20, 21.)

How, as a Christian, can you express your love for others? What outward, tangible, visible effort can you make in the next few days to show someone that your faith in Christ is real?
Key Text: Ephesians 1:16-18

Teachers Aims:
1. To stress that prayer is not merely a last resort when one has exhausted all other options.
2. To understand that praise of God is a significant and indispensable part of prayer.
3. To emphasize the importance of prayer and communion with God in the life of the church.

Lesson Outline:
I. Prayer for the Right Reasons (Eph. 1:19)
   A. The blessings we receive in our life come, ultimately, from God.
   B. Having received salvation is the greatest blessing of all.
   C. As receivers of blessings from God, we should pray for—and actively seek—ways to use these blessings for the good of others.

II. Prayer as Praise (Eph. 1:20, 21)
   A. Praise of God partially consists of efforts to live in a way worthy of Him.
   B. We are to praise God for His acts and also for His attributes—goodness, power, etc.
   C. All of God’s praiseworthy attributes are seen in the life of Christ.

III. Prayer and the Church (Eph. 1:21, 22)
   A. Christ’s life exists on earth through the church.
   B. The church should be an example of the kingdom of God among us.
   C. The prayers of the church as a body are extremely significant to God.

Summary: While God, in the strictest sense, does not need our prayers and praise, we need to pray to Him and praise Him. All the blessings we receive in our individual and collective lives stem from Him, and prayer helps to draw our attention to the fact. Prayer also enables us to be partners with God in His continuing work in the world.

COMMENTARY

Ephesians 1:1-14, a single sentence in Greek, contains Paul’s doxology of praise and thanksgiving. Verses 15-23, again one long sentence, present Paul’s intercessory prayer for the Ephesian believers. Prayer is the highway to God, and we must approach it with great care and reverence. No meaningless cliché, no empty phrase, no simplistic ritual will do. This week’s study deals with two parts of Paul’s prayer: thanksgiving (Eph. 1:15, 16) and intercession (Eph. 1:17-22).

I. Paul’s Thanksgiving (Eph. 1:15, 16)
Thanksgiving is a notable hallmark of Paul’s prayers. He thanks
Wisdom and the Knowledge of God
(Eph. 1:17)

Having noted the first part of Paul’s prayer—thanksgiving for the life of faith and love—we now turn to the intercessory aspect of the apostle’s petition (Eph. 1:17-23). We are often tempted to make our petitions naive, concentrating on material- and self-oriented needs. The nobler aspect of petition is intercession, pleading in someone else’s behalf. Paul prays that God may give the Ephesians “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (vs. 17, NKJV).

According to these texts (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 2:2; 4:5; 9:10; 11:12; Col. 4:5; James 3:13, 17), is biblical wisdom only head knowledge? Justify your answer.

Philosophy may say “Know thyself.” Psychology may assert that in understanding self and its potential, one can find life’s meaning. But there is no knowledge greater than the knowledge of God, and the greatest knowledge that we can have about God is knowledge that He Himself reveals to us.

How has God revealed Himself to us?

Ps. 19:1

John 5:39

John 14:9, 10

Rom. 1:19-21

Heb. 1:1-3

God’s revelation makes possible “the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:17), but “we cannot rightly understand or appreciate divine revelation without the aid of that Spirit by whom the word was given.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 241. Hence, Paul prays for the enlightenment of “the eyes of your heart” (vs. 18, NIV). Believers need more than rational knowledge. They need spiritual insight so that, with the inner eyes of the heart, they may know better four great truths: “the hope of his calling,” “the glory of his inheritance” (vs. 18), “the working of his mighty power” (vs. 19), and Christ’s headship over the church (vss. 22, 23).
God for the believers in Rome whose faith was known globally (*Rom. 1:8*); for God’s grace that revealed Christ among the Corinthians (*1 Cor. 1:4-7*); for the perseverance of faith among the Thessalonians even in the midst of affliction (*2 Thess. 1:3, 4*).

Paul has reason for thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers. “Wherefore,” he says (*Eph. 1:15*). The Greek word may be translated “for this reason.” The reason is that Paul has heard of their faith in Jesus and of their love for one another. What Paul heard must have brought him much joy—as it would to any evangelist. An evangelist goes to a city, proclaims the gospel, and the Holy Spirit moves many—sometimes hundreds or thousands—to accept the gospel. But after the evangelist leaves, the emotional bond is broken, the nurturing process may be defective, and the number of believers slowly dwindles away. Faith in Jesus has numerous competitors, and this must have been so in the city where Diana was worshiped. But, in spite of that potential, the believers have been faithful in the Lord and loving to the saints. No greater reason exists for an evangelist’s joy and thanksgiving!

Faith as belief about Christ is one thing; faith as believing in Christ and being faithful to Him is entirely another. Many would have no hesitation in believing Christ to be a great teacher, a moralist, and even as one god among many. But to accept Him as the Lord of one’s life, to believe and trust in Him as the sole way of salvation and the only reason for existence—that is the kind of faith for which Paul lauds the Ephesians. “For to me to live is Christ” was Paul’s motto (*Phil. 1:21*). “Love unto all the saints” (*Eph. 1:15*) is the second reason for Paul’s thanksgiving. The word all must not be missed. Here’s a church with a mixed congregation: Jews and Gentiles. Paul preached Jesus as One who broke the dividing walls between the two, and that truth had held its power among the Ephesians. They loved all the saints. Where such love is practiced, no power on earth can disrupt the unity or the vitality of the church.

**II. Paul’s Intercession** (*Eph. 1:17-22*)

Intercessory prayer is vital for spiritual growth. Paul intercedes for the Ephesians for three things.

First, wisdom and revelation for a better understanding of God. With the arrival of the gospel, Ephesian believers understood the true nature of God, as distinguished from the only deity that Ephesus had known, Diana, a goddess made of human hands, an idol at whose feet Ephesus lay prostrate. But the gospel brought to them the true nature of God—Creator, personal, loving, and One who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. Ephesian Christians believed in this great revelation. To them to know God is to know Him personally, to relate to Him intimately, and to affirm Him as the Director and Leader of their life affairs. Even so, one cannot know
The Hope and Inheritance (Eph. 1:18)

Read Ephesians 1:18. In your own words, write out what you believe the Lord is telling us with this single text.

In addition to wisdom and knowledge, Paul prays that the Ephesian church would comprehend fully “the hope of his calling” and “the riches of the glory of his inheritance” (vs. 18). In Paul’s writings, calling underscores both Christian privilege and responsibility. God has called us to belong to Christ, to be His saints (Rom. 1:6, 7), and to have “fellowship with his Son” (1 Cor. 1:9, NIV). Because of God’s call, those of us who were not His people have become His people (Rom. 9:24). To those who are called, Christ becomes “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24, NKJV). Believers are called to eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12). The call makes them free and enables them to “serve one another in love” (Gal. 5:13, NIV). The call ensures a harmonious fellowship, cutting across race and class, as we are “called in one body” (Col. 3:15, NKJV) and we are charged to lead a life “worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1, NKJV). This calling expects us “not . . . to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thess. 4:7, NIV) and a peaceful life (Col. 3:15)—“worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12, NKJV). This call to the kingdom is “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14, NKJV), which should motivate us to press forward in the Christian race.

Such is the magnitude of God’s call. It covers the past (forgiveness), embraces the present (life of fellowship and peace), and awaits the future for that “blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NKJV). This is the “hope to which he has called you” (Eph. 1:18, NIV), says Paul, and he prays that we may be enlightened to see its enormity and loftiness.

To hope, Paul adds “the riches of his glorious inheritance” (vs. 18, NIV). Inheritance can be understood in two ways. First, believers are God’s heritage: “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17, NKJV). Second, inheritance is what saints receive from God as His heirs. The latter suggests that inheritance is both a present privilege in that we have the joy of salvation now and a future reward that has been guaranteed and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14). This final reward “is . . . kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4, RSV).

The Bible says we are to be “worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12, NKJV). As sinners, we can never be worthy enough to be saved; but because we are saved, we now want to live “worthy of God.” In this context, what changes do you need to make in order to exhibit this worthiness in your own life?
Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 1:37; Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:12-16; Colossians 4:5; James 3:13, 17

1 When a caterpillar spins its cocoon around itself, it gives no evidence that it will be transformed into a beautiful butterfly. How similar that is to the way we are when we first accept Christ! Yet, God seeks to change us from self-seeking humans into caring, serving agents of His kingdom. Describe how this transformation happens (Eph. 1:15-23, 2:10). What kind deeds can you do this week to show God’s love in a practical way?

2 Take a moment to write a definition for the word power. Check your definition with a dictionary. Now compare it with the biblical definition and manifestation of power (Eph. 1:19-21). How does your definition reflect God’s description? In what ways is your definition different? How would you describe the trustworthiness of God’s power to someone who needs it?

3 The church is not really a building. It is a group of people who are called out of the world. As a unit, we are “his [Christ’s] body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:23, NIV). What spiritual gifts are evident in your church? How are these gifts being used to fulfill the gospel commission? In what ways are you encouraged as you consider what God has done in/through your church? If you were to plan a worship service to highlight God’s saving activity made active through your church family, what would you include?
The Working of His Mighty Power  
(Eph. 1:19-21)

Paul’s prayer has dwelt on the need for wisdom and knowledge and for the understanding of God’s calling and inheritance. Now the apostle concentrates on the need to know “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph. 1:19, NKJV).

One characteristic of God is omnipotence. That means God is all-powerful. How is His power manifested? Give some examples with supporting texts. See, for example, Gen. 2:7, Isa. 66:22, Luke 1:37, 2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Thess. 4:16.

Paul uses four Greek words in Ephesians 1:19 to emphasize the all-inclusive, incomparable nature of God’s power. First, “the exceeding greatness of his power,” the word for “power” is *dunamis*, denoting innate ability to accomplish what one has set out to do. The other three words are “according to the working [energeia] of his mighty [might = *ischys*] power [kratos].” Paul heaps word upon word, almost similar in meaning, to stress the immeasurable and absolute nature of what God’s power has accomplished in the universe. *Energeia* suggests activity and effectiveness. God’s power is at work. *Ischys* refers to intrinsic strength or might. *Kratos*, used in the New Testament in connection with only God or His Word, suggests the power that subdues or is victorious. Putting these four words together, we have a grand declaration: “The exceeding greatness of God’s power is seen in what He has set out to accomplish. This He did with all His strength, winning a great victory by subduing and defeating His opponent.”

The apostle immediately adds that this supreme demonstration of God’s power is seen in what God has “accomplished in Christ” (Eph. 1:20, RSV). Paul defines this attainment in three ideas:

**Resurrection:** “He raised him from the dead” (vs. 20). To Paul, the supreme manifestation of God’s love is the death of Christ (Rom. 5:8), and the supreme manifestation of God’s power is Christ’s resurrection (Eph. 1:19, 20).

**Exaltation:** “Seated Him at His right hand” (vs. 20, NKJV).

**Universal dominion:** “He put all things under His feet” (vs. 22, NKJV). Christ is the Lord of the universe.

The power that brought Christ from the dead is the same power that saves us from sin to salvation. Why, then, do we continue to fall as much as we do if we have such an incredible power working in us? Where must the fault lie? How do our own choices determine the extent of what God will do in us?
Witnessing

Ask just about anybody how important communication is in today’s world, and you will likely hear that the ability to stay in close contact is an essential part of everyday life. It is critical to be able to reach your coworkers or department head when you need to close a big deal; it is vital to be able to reach your children’s school in the event of an emergency; it is imperative that you take the call from your doctor with your latest test results. Whatever adjective we might use to describe the urgency we have to communicate, the need is real.

When human beings are in trouble, when they require reassurance, when they need to talk to a friend, there is one way to make an instant connection with Someone who has all the answers, who is available 24/7/365, and who is waiting to take the call. His name and number are available to everyone; and He has shared clear instructions on how to reach Him. He is God Almighty, and the instant connection to Him is through prayer.

Helping nonbelievers connect with God through prayer is a blessing and a privilege. Assisting them in understanding that prayer opens their hearts and minds to God’s love and His gift of eternal life. As supplicants, show them they may talk with God at any time: while riding a bus, weeding the garden, attending a meeting, ironing a shirt.

This week, make a point of inviting at least two nonbelievers to join you in prayer. Gently teach them to pray as Jesus taught while here on earth.

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt. 6:9-13).

Third, Paul prays that the Ephesians may understand “the exceeding greatness” (Eph. 1:19) of the power of Jesus. The apostle refers to two kinds of Christ’s power: the Resurrection power (Eph. 1:20) and the eschatological power (vss. 21, 22). Both are crucial for the understanding of the ultimate victory in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. The Resurrection power guaranteed the vanquishing of death and Satan. The empty tomb is forever the fitting answer to Satan’s accusation in heaven that Jesus did not deserve the position of equality with the Father. When Jesus arose from the dead, He showed to the universe that He is God and in
The Church, Christ’s Body

How does Paul declare the majesty and glory of Christ’s ultimate victory over Satan and His intimate relationship with the church? Eph. 1:20-23.

The fourth entreaty in Paul’s prayer is a masterful mix of praise and petition. Praise because of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Petition that the believers may know that Christ’s victory over death and His exaltation had two effects of cosmic significance. First, God has placed Christ above “all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet” (Eph. 1:21, 22, NKJV). Here is the signal to the universe that in the great cosmic battle between Christ and Satan, Christ has won the ultimate victory, and now all things are put under Him. He is the acknowledged Lord of all (Phil. 2:9-11).

Second, God has made Christ “head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph. 1:22, 23, NKJV).

Dwell on the implications of Ephesians 1:23, when it says that the church is Christ’s body. What does that mean? What kind of responsibilities does that entail for those who are members of that body? See also 1 Cor. 12:12-25.

The body metaphor emphasizes the essential unity of the church with/in Christ. The very existence of the church as a community of believers is dependent upon the saving work of Christ. Its founding and its ultimate destination in the new earth are all grounded in Him. Apart from Christ, there is no church. The risen Lord is the Lord not only of the universe but also of the church. Hence Paul says, He is the Head of the church “which is his body” (Eph. 1:23). As the Head, the source and locus of authority and mission of the church is Christ.

Because of this closeness, this oneness of the church as the body of Christ, God has filled the church with “fullness of Him who fills all in all” (vs. 23, NKJV). Here is perfect assurance: Christ fills the church with every blessing and gift (Eph. 4:11-16) in order that the church may remain faithful to Him as His body.

What words of admonition and counsel would you give to someone (in light of today’s lesson) who said, “I don’t need to be part of any church or organized body in order to serve the Lord”? 
Him is life “original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 530.

The eschatological power by which all things are put under Jesus’ feet is the final and ultimate vindication that Christ is Lord over and above all things (Eph. 1:22). Paul’s prayer is that Christians will understand that genuine power rests with Jesus, both in saving us from sin and in restoring all things to God. Because of that, the Ephesians must stand assured that their choice of Jesus over Diana is one that guarantees their eternal inheritance in God’s kingdom.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: In the 70s there was a TV program called Mission Impossible. A team of special agents accomplished “impossible” things to rescue people. What courageous things have you done in your life? Why do those things seem so small compared to the great things God wants to accomplish through us? In what ways have you made Luke 1:37 a motto for your life?

Thought Question:
Salespeople take every opportunity they can to make a sale. Because of this reputation, we usually try to avoid them. Paul invites us to be proactive on behalf of the gospel. “Make the most of every opportunity” (Col. 4:5, NIV), he encourages, when talking with people who have not heard about Christ. What is the difference between selling goods and sharing the good news? How can we be wise and understanding servants of Jesus instead of pushy, obnoxious salespeople?

Application Question:
In Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church, he asks for some powerful interventions in their lives. Review Ephesians 1:17-19. What does it mean to have your heart be “enlightened” and to “know the hope” (NIV) to which you have been called? How has God’s “incomparably great power” (vs. 19, NIV) been worked out in your spiritual journey? Write Paul’s prayer on a card or in your appointment book. Ask God very specifically to bless your life with understanding from the Holy Spirit. Keep a record of how He answers this prayer.
Further Study: Saving faith. “It is not enough to believe about Christ; we must believe in Him... Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God... A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

On God’s revelation. “The revelation of Himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him... Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 279.

Christ, the Head of the church. “Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church—He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church...

“Loyalty to Christ demands the faithful performance of church duties. This is an important part of one’s training; and in a church imbued with the Master’s life, it will lead directly to effort for the world without.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 268, 269.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a class, review the essence of Paul’s prayer, as revealed in the texts for this week. For what, essentially, is he praying? Is this something you should be praying for, as well? Discuss.

2. Paul prays for wisdom and knowledge in order that the believers may fully know God. For the Greeks, to know God means to know Him intellectually; in the Hebrew sense, it means to know Him experientially. Discuss the difference between the two.

3. In light of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:20-23 about the victory Christ has won, discuss, as a class, the important question of why the battle with Satan and sin still continues. What insights in our understanding of the great controversy help us answer this question?
The Church: God’s Workmanship

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 3:24-28; 6:8-11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:12, 13.

Memory Text: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NKJV).

Frenchman Michael Foucault once advocated tearing down all prisons and letting the prisoners go free. Why? Mssr. Foucault believed that concepts of morality, or right and wrong, good and evil, were purely human constructs, human inventions created by people in power in order to keep other people down. Therefore, taking his beliefs to their logical conclusion, he stated that even the idea of criminality was a human invention, and thus all the prisoners should be set free.

However extreme his idea, it’s indicative of the prevailing sentiment in many places that there is no such thing as sin and that such ideas as morality and right and wrong are mere opinions, nothing more.

This week’s lesson—though ending on a hopeful and positive note—begins with a clear expression of the reality of sin and the inevitability of its consequence: death (which is hardly a human construct, to be sure). This week, let’s see what Paul has to say, not only about evil but also about the only solution to it.

The Week at a Glance: Before Christ, what was our condition like? Why and how did God show us grace and mercy? What does being God’s workmanship involve? How are we saved?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.
Dead in Sin *(Eph. 2:1-3)*

From the time Adam and Eve chose to follow their own will instead of God’s, sin has become the lot of the human race. “Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” *(Rom. 5:12, NKJV)*. And because sin is universal *(Rom. 3:23)*, death is also.

**How** do the following texts help us understand the nature of sin?

- Isa. 59:2
- Rom. 14:23
- James 1:15
- 1 John 3:4

Ephesians 2:2, 3 tells three things about unbelievers. First, they lived “like the rest of the world” *(vs. 2, NLT)* in disobedience to God and disunity among themselves. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God *(James 4:4)*, and as enemies they lived a life of darkness and alienation. Second, they followed “the prince of the power of the air” *(Eph. 2:2, NKJV)*. The prince is Satan. Jesus called him “the prince of this world” *(John 12:31)*. While some would dismiss Satan as a myth, the Bible tells us he is a reality—“a roaring lion,” out to devour God’s people *(1 Pet. 5:8)*, and an “accuser of our brethren” *(Rev. 12:10)* who leads men and women to disobey God *(Eph. 2:2)*.

Third, they are corrupt and “by nature children of wrath” *(vs. 3, NKJV)*. Sin corrupts everything—mind, thought, action, desire, will, etc.—and, as such, their nature is depraved and within them there is a perpetual conflict. This spiritually corrupt and bankrupt nature makes sinners the “children of wrath” *(vs. 3, NKJV)*—children deserving God’s judgment.

So, what is the status of unbelievers? They are dead in sin. They have sealed their own fate by choosing to live “the desires of the flesh” *(vs. 3)* and becoming children subject to God’s wrath. They are dead—dead in a sense of finality, humanly speaking.

Look up James 4:4. What does it mean to be “a friend of the world”? How are we, as Christians, to understand this important point (after all, to be a friend of the world is to be at enmity with God), especially in light of John 3:16, which says that God loves the world? Prepare to discuss your answers in class.
Key Text: Ephesians 2:1-3

Teachers Aims:
1. To stress that evil and sin are real things, not illusions.
2. To demonstrate the human responsibility for evil and sin and their consequences.
3. To understand that only God in Christ is the solution to the problems of sin and evil.

Lesson Outline:
I. The Reality of Sin (Eph. 2:2)
   A. Evil exists objectively, apart from our opinions of what it is or is not.
   B. Evil is the result of evil actions, or sin.
   C. The results of sin can be seen clearly in the human and natural world.

II. Missing the Mark (Eph. 2:3)
   A. Sin entered the present world as a result of Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience.
   B. Death, both spiritual and physical, is the inevitable result of sin.
   C. All people who sin are, in a real sense, dead in their sin.

III. But for the Grace of God . . . (Eph. 2:4)
   A. Everyone since Adam and Eve has been a participant in, or victim of, sin.
   B. God in Christ has delivered us from sin and thus made us alive in Him, as long as we exercise faith.
   C. Christians, both as individuals and as a community, come to their current saved status by grace alone, nothing more.

Summary: Evil is an ever-present reality in our world, and all of it can be traced to human sin at some point. This reality is so unpleasant that many people today choose to ignore its existence or refer to it by other less grating terms. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and death continue to exist, and only God can save us from them.

COMMENTARY

Our study this week presents a dramatic and powerful movement: from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from aliens to God’s workmanship. The central figure, as always, is Christ, who has “quickened” us “who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) and made us “his workmanship” (vs. 10). Ephesians 2:1-10 introduces the making of God’s family on earth. Paul describes this making in three steps: what we were, what God has done for us, and what we are today.

I. What We Were (Eph. 2:1-3)
   Remembering the past is a good thing. It provides an appropriate context for review of the past and reflection of the present.
“But God . . .”

Paul was a master in conveying God’s great truths. In Ephesians 2:1-3, He describes the pathetic plight of unbelievers: dead in sin, slaves of Satan, walking according to the lusts of the flesh, condemned as children of wrath, hopeless and destitute, unable to save themselves. In verse 4, the apostle introduces the glorious alternative available to this pathetic lot in two dramatic words, “But God.”

These two words may be among the Bible’s most beautiful words. We were dead, “but God”; we were rebels, “but God”; we were under judgment of death, “but God”; we were aliens and strangers, “but God”; Satan may seem triumphant, “but God.” As long as those two words are in biblical vocabulary, we have hope.

Look up the following texts and note how the phrase “but God” is used: Psalm 73:26; Acts 13:29, 30; Romans 5:7, 8; 6:16, 17; Philippians 2:27. What hope is seen there for us?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Why did God come forward to deliver us from the bondage of death? Why did God choose to rescue us from the clutches of sin? Why didn’t He let Adam and Eve perish in their choice? Why didn’t He make Himself new creatures who would love and follow His way?

The apostle provides two answers. First, because God “is rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4). Mercy is intrinsic to the nature of God: “(The Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you’ ” (Deut. 4:31, NKJV), for “He is good! . . . His mercy endures forever” (Ps. 106:1, NKJV). Mercy is so important to the salvation process that the redeemed are called “vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:23, NKJV).

Second, “because of His great love with which He loved us” (Eph. 2:4, NKJV). God’s love—selfless on the part of the giver, undeserved on the part of the receiver—is the motivation for giving “His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJV). God’s “gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, vol. 9, p. 190.

Write a paragraph that begins, “I [your name] was [talk about your spiritual and mental state before you knew the Lord], but God [now write out what He has done for you through Christ].”
Nowhere is this more true than in understanding the delight of salvation that Christians enjoy in the present.

What was our past like? Note Paul’s descriptive phrases in Ephesians 2:1-3: We were dead in sin; we walked according to the world; we were slaves to Satan, fulfilling the desires of the flesh; and, hence, we were under the wrath of God. Not a pretty picture, is it? But that’s what we were before coming to Christ: dead; not sick, not dying, but dead.

We can never comprehend the biblical concept of redemption unless we fully understand the biblical teaching of sin. Sin is not a sickness; not a behavioral aberration; not a moral failure; not a psychological deficiency. Sin is a rebellion against God—and in this rebellion, sinners have a faithful ally: Satan, the first rebel. With such an ally as our master, with rebellion against God as our wish and way, we became slaves to sin. To recognize that sinful past is to acknowledge that we were rebels against God, subjects of His wrath, and candidates for the final death. We may follow our lusts, walk in the pleasures of flesh, live as though sin is not real—but we cannot escape the consequence of death (Rom. 6:23).

II. What God Has Done for Us (Eph. 2:4-9)

Against such a dreadful and hopeless past, and against the finality of death, Paul presents the good news of the gospel. And he begins with a powerful phrase, “But God . . .”

No evil force, no deadly condition, not even Satan can stand against the mighty purposes of God expressed in that phrase. God had set His mind to crush the power of sin and Satan to redeem humanity from sin and death. Nothing less than that purpose and power of God can rescue and redeem the sinner.

Why did God choose to do this? Paul provides five reasons—each a gem that should be inlaid in our hearts: (1) His rich mercy, (2) His great love to us sinners, (3) Christ offering Himself to die for sin, (4) the riches of His grace, and (5) His kindness toward us.

The grace of God through Christ is the basis of our salvation. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9). “In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 68.

Life outside that grace is a life under wrath, under a death sentence from its own master (“The wages of sin is death” [Rom 6:23]). But life under God’s grace takes us from the gutters of lust and pleasure to the power of resurrection and the privilege of sitting in heavenly places with Christ (Eph. 2:6, 7).

What’s more, the entire redemptive process is “the gift of God” (vs. 8). Before that wondrous gift, let all human surmising and boasting cease. Here are God’s love and grace. Here are Christ’s
“Made Us Alive” *(Eph. 2:5, NKJV)*

When he speaks of God’s grace, love, and mercy toward sinners, Paul repeatedly uses such superlatives as “riches,” “rich,” “great,” and “exceeding.” Such usage shows the supreme value this former Pharisee placed on salvation as God’s gift and not a result of human works. Ephesians 2:1-8 clearly outlines the movement of sinners from death to life.

Read Ephesians 2:5, 6 and note three things God does for us in Christ. The first few words are given to you.

He has “quickened us”

He “raised us”

He “made us sit”

In Greek, each of the above phrases begins with the prefix *sun*, meaning “together with.” This indicates that all believers will share these blessings together with one another and together with Christ.

First, He “made us alive together with Christ” *(Eph. 2:5, NKJV).* Those who believe in Christ and die with Him become participants of His resurrection power, and they become spiritually alive together with the risen Lord *(Rom. 6:8-11).*

How have you experienced being “made alive in Christ”?

Second, He “raised us up” *(Eph. 2:6, NKJV).* This raising up in Christ is not without purpose: We are to live for Him. The new life we as Christians enjoy must be a witness to the power of Christ’s resurrection by revealing that power in our life and character.

How have you experienced being “raised up” by Christ?

Third, He “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” *(vs. 6).* The Christian’s ultimate privilege will be that of sitting with Christ and reigning with Him *(2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 22:5).* Even now we can be examples to the universe of His enduring love and justice. Even now we can sit in “heavenly places” with Jesus when we, by faith, live in intimacy with Him.

How have you experienced this “sitting together” with Jesus now?
cross and resurrection. Come and taste and enter the heavenly places. And see what God offers you in Christ!

III. What We Are Today  (Eph. 2:10)
From death to life to God’s workmanship—Paul completes the

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:12, 13

1. In American Sign Language the sign for dead is to have one hand palm up, the other hand palm down, then at the same time, reverse the position of each hand. Sin has turned our world upside down. We all are dead to what God planned for us. Despite our rebellion, God reached out to set right again what was so wrong. Have your class recite John 3:16, 17 together. Discuss the significance of what God has done. Pray together, asking for a deeper understanding of God’s mission on earth and how we each can be involved in fulfilling that mission.

2. Faced with impossible situations of failure and controversy, we tend to throw up our hands and walk away. But God seeks to offer hope when we feel despair and futility. Why does God want to make us “alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Eph. 2:5, NIV)? What does this tell you about your value to Him? Why is your worth to God so hard to accept?

3. Superlatives are used to broaden and deepen verbal descriptions. For example, not just blue water but rich, velvety blue. Discuss the superlatives Paul uses in Romans 3:24-28 and Ephesians 2:1-10. Why was it important to Paul that God justifies freely (Rom. 3:24) or grants us “the incomparable riches of his grace” (Eph. 2:6, NIV)?

4. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves” (Eph. 2:8, NKJV). Why is it so hard to accept the “not of yourselves” portion of this text? Is it an inherited or learned trait to be skeptical and to want to do things by ourselves, through our own power? Why is it necessary to receive His Holy Spirit?

5. We are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Eph. 2:10, NIV). This begins when we take a noticeable stand to be on God’s side and under His lordship (see Col. 2:12). Why is it so important for human beings to act on what they know? Think back to your baptism (or a baptism you have witnessed). Recount the actual, practical results of such a tangible witness for Jesus.
By Grace Through Faith (Rom. 3:24-28; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:4-7)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NKJV).

These two verses summarize the heart of Paul’s gospel. Paul’s thesis is that grace is God’s part in salvation, faith is the human response, and the entire salvation experience that comes by grace through faith is a gift of God, not of works.

Grace and faith are the key words here. How do we understand them?

Grace refers to God’s initiative and the basis of our redemption from sin. As sinners we deserve death, and God offers us life. We are separated from Him and from one another, and He offers us reconciliation. We are under bondage to sin and judgment, and He provides us freedom. We do not deserve any of what He offers, because we have sinned and stand in rebellion against God (Col. 1:21). Hence, grace is often defined as God’s unmerited favor to us.

Grace is God’s sovereign initiative and activity for the salvation of sinners. This grace appeared in the “fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4, NKJV) in the historic event of Jesus Christ—more specifically, the act of Christ on the cross. We have no part in either the conception or execution of salvation. It is God’s gift to “whoever believes” in Jesus (John 3:16, NKJV).

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18. How does this text help us better understand the concept of grace? Who did the reconciling, and for whom?

Faith is the human response to God’s provision. In a Christian sense, faith is not a virtue we develop on our own. It is a response of wonder at what God has done to redeem us from sin and a ready acceptance of God’s operating in our lives. Saving faith is a change of allegiance—from self to God, from denial or indifference to God’s claims to unreserved acceptance. Faith opens the heart to the indwelling of Christ. As such, it cannot originate in the carnal heart. It is “the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 431.

How would you help someone who says, “I am just so weak in faith. I believe, but my faith wavers so much”? What practical steps can we take to make our faith stronger? How does what we read, think, and say impact our faith?
journey from the hopelessness of the past to the wonder and responsibility of the present. Christians are no longer under sin, but they are saved. They are now the children of God, and as such are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:10). Paul has already described salvation as liberation from slavery, resurrection from the dead, and a rescue from condemnation. But now he uses creation language. Salvation is not self-correction, not self-creation. Nothing self can do can achieve salvation. It is a result of Christ’s creation; indeed, a re-creation, a new creation.

But being re-created by the grace of God through Jesus does not mean that the saved person is freed from all responsibility. God makes His masterpiece of new men and women in order that they may manifest in their lives His will and character. “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20), Jesus said, thus emphasizing that a Christian life does not free us from sin in order that we may

### Witnessing

When you love someone, *really* love someone, you cannot seem to do enough for that person. You want to show her or him every good thing in life. You have a burning need to express in every way possible the depth of your devotion. It becomes a driving goal to fulfill your love’s every need and desire.

This overwhelming spiritual, emotional, and physical connection to a significant other is exactly how the promise of eternal life affects those who accept God’s plan of salvation. They become one with Him; their thoughts and actions reflect His influence in their lives; they are incomplete without Him.

Because God’s people feel the intensity of their commitment to Him, they cannot hold the good news in check. It is their belief that His message of redemption must be shared with as many others as possible and at every possible occasion. Acts of love and mercy toward others naturally occur out of such deep devotion and affection for the Lord.

When Christ Jesus takes over the heart, it is impossible to wish harm on others. Offering grace, which is always unmerited by the very definition of grace, is following the Savior’s example. When someone this week talks badly to you, meet their anger with a peaceful response. As you are driving the car over the next few days, if someone cuts you off, resist retaliating. Instead, give that person room to move ahead. Look for as many instances as possible to show that you are driven by a different kind of passion—one that desires to soothe, not inflame; one that strives to turn a volatile situation into a redemptive event. Even if your efforts are met with little support, you know that grace and mercy have been extended—you can do no more.
“We Are His Workmanship” (Eph. 2:10)

Paul stresses so clearly in Ephesians 2:8, 9 that we are not saved by works. Then, immediately, in verse 10, he says that we were not only “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” but that we were “before ordained” to walk in those good works. Is there a contradiction here? How do you understand what Paul is saying in these three verses?

Paul’s salvation story closes with the affirmation that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (vs. 10, NIV). We as individual Christians or as a community of faith owe our existence to God’s grace. We are His workmanship, His masterpiece, His work of art, created in Christ Jesus.

This ought not to be a matter of pride. Paul has warned against such boasting in verse 9: “Not of works, lest anyone should boast” (NKJV). Our works, however good and great and lasting they may be, cannot save us. In salvation, self-congratulation has no place. God expects only self-denial, self-death, in order that Christ may reign in our hearts as supreme—without any competitor. “Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence. . . . This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us.”—Ellen G. White, Maranatha, p. 78.

Christians must guard against two fallacies. First, the idea that we need to add something of our own to God’s grace. Second, freedom in Christ frees us from obedience to His claims.

Yes, we are His workmanship. We are a new creation by His grace through faith. But we are new creatures in Christ “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (vs. 10, NIV). Does this mean our works are a prerequisite to our salvation? Far from it. But they are a requisite of a saved life. Paul’s appeal is for a life and a lifestyle consistent with the demands of faith. In effect, the apostle is saying: “Yes, you are saved by faith. You are saved by the free grace of God. But you are saved to live. Your faith experience must move from believing to living. You must live out your salvation. That involves a lifestyle of obedience, just like our great model—Christ Jesus—who obeyed even to the point of humiliation and death (Phil. 2:5-12). And, furthermore, your Christian walk is your personal responsibility; no one else can do it for you.”
indulge in a life of ease and purposelessness. Salvation turns us into God’s workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works”—that is to say, to reflect God’s works of righteousness in our lives. Good works are not a prerequisite for salvation, but they are a requisite. We are not saved by good works, but neither can our salvation be genuine without good works.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** If you have done any gardening, you may have had a plant that you thought had died only to burst to life in the spring. Have class members share some of their gardening stories. Maybe you have a “black” thumb instead of a “green” one. What is Paul addressing when he says we have been “made . . . alive” (Eph. 2:5, NIV) even when we were dead in transgressions? What part does God’s rich mercy play in our spiritual renewal?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Sin is ugly, irrational, and contagious. List other adjectives that describe sin. Why do we so easily fall into “gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires” (Eph. 2:3, NIV) when our descriptions of sin are so detestable? Consider the contrast Paul paints: “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 2:6, NIV). Share your testimony of how the contrast between sin and salvation has compelled you into a personal relationship with Christ.

2. Have you ever gone to a “free” car wash only to find out those doing the job really expected some type of payment? We have become jaded by free offers that really were not. Perhaps this is why we have a hard time accepting that we have been “justified freely by his grace” (Rom. 3:24, NIV). Discuss how you would share this good news with a skeptic. Ask God to paint a deeper understanding of this wonderful grace through you.

**Application Question:**

We all have heard stories about families in turmoil. A tragic component occurs when a member dies without anyone taking the opportunity to heal the hurt or make right the wrong. “God . . . reconciled us to himself” (2 Cor. 5:18, NIV). Using the Bible, do a word study on reconciliation. Ask God to help you understand the significance and power of reconciliation. Then ask Him to give you courage to reconcile with someone He brings to mind. How might it affect your local church if every member allowed God to make her or him an agent of reconciliation?
Further Study: Righteousness by faith alone. “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. . . . If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy.” —Ellen G. White, Faith and Works, pp. 19, 20.

On fruit-bearing. “Those who become new creatures in Christ Jesus will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ Galatians 5:22, 23. They will no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of God they will follow in His steps, reflect His character, and purify themselves even as He is pure. The things they once hated they now love, and the things they once loved they hate. The proud and self-assertive become meek and lowly in heart. The vain and supercilious become serious and unobtrusive. The drunken become sober, and the profligate pure. The vain customs and fashions of the world are laid aside.”—Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 58.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the question asked at the end of Sunday’s study about friendship with the world and what that means.

2. As a class, discuss the two Ellen G. White quotes listed above. How do you harmonize the teachings presented there?

3. Talk about this idea of morals and values and ideas of right and wrong being only relative. Are there some ideas of right and wrong that are purely relative, subjective, and personal, or is everything absolute?

4. What can you do as a class to help everyone in your local church better understand the great truth of salvation by faith alone?
The Church Without Walls

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 3:20-31, 5:12-18, 2 Cor. 5:17-19, Eph. 2:11-22, Col. 1:20-22.

Memory Text: “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Ephesians 2:14, NKJV).

The impossible possibility: 1 + 1 = 1. Impossible? Not so when it comes to the mathematics of the gospel of Christ. Paul’s forceful message this week is: What is impossible in human equation is possible under divine power and provision. Christ has created “in Himself one new man from the two” (Eph. 2:15, NKJV), and this He did only through His blood, shed on the cross in behalf of all humanity, Jews and Gentiles.

The transforming power of the Cross creates a new humanity in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, 29, NKJV). The good news is that while differences may exist between persons, genders, cultures, races, and nations, the ultimate divine purpose is to bring all created order into one unity “in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). All these distinctions, though real, are superseded by the unity we have in Jesus.

The Week at a Glance: What was the position of Gentiles before they found Christ? What was the end purpose of God in making Israel His chosen people? How were the walls of separation between people torn down? What were the results of Christ’s ministry of reconciliation? In what sense are we God’s family and temple?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.
Outside of Christ: Alienation (Eph. 2:11, 12)

Having shown in the first part of Ephesians 2 that God’s grace has brought the free gift of salvation to individuals, the apostle, from verse 11, shifts his focus to what God has done to bring about reconciliation to hitherto divided communities.

In Ephesians 2:11, 12 Paul mentions four disabilities of the Gentiles who lived without Christ. Identify them:

- ____________________________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________________________
- ____________________________________________________________________

Paul begins on a practical note. Name-calling is both unchristian and offensive. Jews called the Gentiles uncircumcised in a derogatory sense and called themselves circumcised in a sense of pride. Paul declares the futility of such name-calling by saying the circumcision of the Jews was, after all, “made in the flesh by hands” (Eph. 2:11, NKJV). Although circumcision had its spiritual significance at one time, now in Christ it is surpassed by the circumcision of the heart—a spiritual covenant available to both Jews and Gentiles alike.

In Romans Paul lists the privileges of the Jews (Rom. 3:1, 2; 9:3-5). What were those privileges, and in light of what Paul said here about the state of the Gentiles, what responsibilities should have come with those privileges and advantages?

In contrast to the Jews, the Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of God. They had no part in the covenant of promise. They had no hope and, hence, no future. Worst of all, they had no true God, even though they had “many gods” and “many lords” (1 Cor. 8:5, NKJV). All they had was this world with its twisted philosophy, lurid pleasures, and pagan lifestyles. That was the plight of the Gentiles; in many ways this reflects the plight of all who live in the darkness of sin and separation from God.

Hostility between two groups is nothing new in history. While we may be quick to condemn the hostility between Jews and Gentiles as being unchristian, are there areas in which we exhibit such hostility? What can you or your local church do to elimi-
**Key Text:** Ephesians 2:14

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To stress that in saving us, Christ has also broken down barriers between human beings.
2. To warn against spiritual pride in the present-day church.
3. To encourage us to look beyond the very obvious differences among church members.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. All Are One in Christ Jesus** *(Eph. 2:15)*

A. Christ’s intention for the people He has saved is unity.
B. Strife between individuals or groups is a result of sin.
C. Only Christ can make it possible for unity to exist.

**II. Saved to Serve** *(Eph. 2:19-22)*

A. The natural human tendency is to divide others into insiders and outsiders and to denigrate the latter.
B. God wants all of us to be insiders.
C. The only differences between insiders and outsiders in God’s scheme are grace and responsibility.

**III. No More Walls** *(Eph. 2:22)*

A. In the church, God’s goal of unity has been, in a real sense, accomplished.
B. We, as members of God’s church, are to accept this reality in our own lives and relationships.
C. The unity of the church is a foretaste of God’s kingdom after the Second Coming.

**Summary:** While human beings may seem to have—and actually do have—different agendas and interests, the human condition is just that: human. We all are sinners in need of a Savior. God recognizes the essential unity of humanity and has brought humans of all kinds into His church. The true church will be one in which members are actively attempting to achieve unity.

**COMMENTARY**

Ephesians 2:11-22 presents a series of contrasts: “without Christ” and “in Christ” *(vss. 12, 13)*, far and near *(vs. 13)*, “enmity” and “peace” *(vs. 15)*, “broken down” and built up *(vss. 14, 21)*, “aliens” and “citizens” *(vss. 12, 19)*, strangers without God and members of God’s household *(vss. 12, 19)*. Jesus “abolished in his flesh . . . the law of commandments” *(vs. 15)*. The Cross is, thus, God’s instrument of breaking down alienation, division, and sin’s curse; after breaking down, the Cross builds God’s household in which unity and oneness, reconciliation and peace, reign.
In Christ: Nearness *(Eph. 2:13)*

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” *(Eph. 2:13, NKJV).*

“But now.” Two little words introduce a theme that changed the course of redemptive history. At one time the Gentiles were without Christ, outside God’s commonwealth, without the covenant of promise, without hope and God. “But now” heaven has intervened in the person of Christ to deal with the tragic and pathetic situation the Gentiles were in.

In choosing Israel, God “called them to preserve among men the knowledge of His law, and of the symbols and prophecies that pointed to the Saviour. He desired them to be as wells of salvation to the world. . . . They were to reveal God to men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages,* p. 27. How does Israel’s call relate to us, as Adventists, today?

The words *far* and *near* describe the position of the Gentiles and the Jews. The rabbis proudly claimed that no nation is as near to God as Israel. That was true as part of God’s covenant with Israel; however, “nearness” was not to be understood as exclusiveness but, rather, as a communication privilege from which was to flow a witnessing duty to those who were “far”; that is, to the Gentiles. Israel failed in this duty. Isaiah predicted the day when the distance between “far” and “near” will disappear and peace will come to both *(Isa. 57:19).*

To Paul, that Messianic day has come “by the blood of Christ” *(Eph. 2:13).* One privilege the Jews held dear was that of being near to God’s temple and thus near to God’s mercy seat. The sacrificial blood played a crucial role in the temple rituals in the forgiveness of sins and keeping the Jews near God’s presence. The apostle moves from the blood of the animal to the blood of Christ, through which “a new and living way [has] opened for us” in order that we may “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” *(Heb. 10:20, 22, NIV).*

In Christ, distance disappears. There is nearness, heavenly citizenship, promise, hope, and peace.

Ancient Israel believed it had been given special light and truth. And it had! Yet, look what spiritual pride had done to the nation. How do we as Adventists, who also believe we have been given special light and truth (and we have!), protect ourselves from this danger?
Although Paul is addressing primarily the division that plagued the Gentiles and the Jews of his time, his message is timeless and speaks to our world, torn apart by various forces of disunity and hatred. The lesson divides itself into three sections: “At that time” (Eph. 2:12); “But now” (vs. 13); “Now therefore” (vs. 19).

I. “At That Time” (Eph. 2:11, 12)

Paul’s writings reveal a profound sense of history and a commitment to Christology. Of this, we have here one great example. Paul begins his argument against disunity as rooted in history (“being in time past” and “at that time” [vss. 11, 12]) and theology (“without Christ” and “without God” [vs. 12]). The apostle recognizes the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, a wall that alienated and dehumanized two peoples. But God was not responsible for that wall. God’s choice of Israel rested not on their merits but on His sovereignty (Deut. 7:6-9). But the purpose of that choice was not Israel’s exclusivism but that they might be a light to all the world. “But the people of Israel lost sight of their high privileges as God’s representatives. They forgot God, and failed to fulfill their holy mission. . . . All their advantages they appropriated for their own glorification. They shut themselves away from the world. . . . They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow-men of religious guidance and a holy example.”—Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 14, 15.

Consequently, before Christ came, the Gentiles were (1) “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” (2) “strangers from the covenants of promise,” (3) “having no hope,” and (4) without the knowledge of the true God (Eph. 2:12). How desperate the conditions of the Gentiles then, and, similarly, of people now who are outside Christ. Paul asks Gentiles then and us now: Remember the spiritual condition outside of Christ, and don’t ever become self-arrogant in your position of being in Christ and relate to other people groups in the same way the Jews did with the Gentiles.

II. “But Now” (Eph. 2:13)

If prior to Christ Gentiles were alienated from the citizenship of God’s kingdom (vs. 12), now that Christ has come, those who “were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace” (vss. 13, 14).

Paul’s insight is foundational to the understanding of the gospel. To speak of blood as a means of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God may seem revolting in some theological circles. But according to the Bible, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” of sin (Heb. 9:22, NIV), and Christ “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26).

Christ’s blood is God’s only way to deal with sin. Through His blood, Christ did away with the sacrificial system that had kept the
No More Walls *(Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:14, 15)*

The blood of Jesus has eliminated the distance between those who were afar and those who were near; that is, it eliminated the distance between Jew and Gentile *(Eph. 2:13)*. How? Why? In what ways does Christ’s shed blood show that we are all the same? See Rom. 3:20-31, 5:12-18.

From now on, Christ “Himself is our peace” *(Eph. 2:14, NKJV)*. Christ—and no one else! As our peace, what did Christ do?

First, He “has broken down the middle wall of separation” *(vs. 14, NKJV)*. The wall points to more than the temple wall that cut off the court of the Gentiles from other areas to which only Jews had access. It refers to religious, social, and political divisions that kept the two groups apart. But in dying for the sins of all humanity, Christ has brought peace in two dimensions: vertically, between God and humanity; horizontally, between person and person. The former proclaims that God loves all alike; the latter demands that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” *(Gal. 3:28, NKJV)*.

Second, Christ “abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances” *(Eph. 2:15, NKJV)*. Though there’s been a great debate over which law Paul is talking about here (moral or ceremonial), Paul’s point is that through Christ anything that had divided Jews and Gentiles has been abolished in Jesus. All are now united in Him. Christ brought peace, and hence Paul says: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything” *(Gal. 6:15, NKJV)*.

Third, Christ created “in Himself one new man from the two” *(Eph. 2:15, NKJV)*. That is the gospel mathematics: $1 + 1 = 1$. The impossibility becomes possible. No more Jew, no more Gentile, but one new creation *(2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV)* in which people define their status not in terms of caste, color, gender, nationality, or tribe but in terms of an abiding relationship with the Christ of the Cross. “Jesus has succeeded in creating a new society, in fact a new humanity. . . . And this new human unity in Christ is the pledge and foretaste of that final unity under Christ’s headship.”—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 93.

What prejudices might you be clinging to that go contrary to what we have been promised in Christ regarding the “new humanity”? How can you change?
Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Romans 3:20-31, 5:12-18, Ephesians 2:11-22, Colossians 1:20-22

1. National and religious pride got in the way of the mission God had given to the ancient Hebrew nation. Such division and alienation are reflected in our world. What difference would a ministry of reconciliation make? (2 Cor. 5:17-19). What would you say to someone who expresses such doubts as “One person cannot make a difference?” How does Jesus exhibit the power of one person as an agent of change?

2. When we are away from family and friends, we need to communicate or travel to maintain our connection with them. Being near indicates the possibility of fellowship or interaction. God wants us to have access to Him, so He brought us near “through the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13, NIV). What lengths do you go through to be near the ones you care about? Why does God want us to go to the same effort to reach those who are far from Him?

3. What comes to mind when you hear someone say “Adventists are a movement of divine destiny”? What is the message we have been given to share? How can our election create a similar pride to that of the Jews? How do we avoid the pitfalls they experienced? How does the message of Romans 3:20-31 compel us to share hope with others? How does your personal testimony of rescue from sin give a sense of urgency to your desire to save others from eternal loss?
Reconciliation and Access (2 Cor. 5:17-19, Eph. 2:16-18, Col. 1:20-22)

Read the verses listed above for today. Summarize the basic message found in them. How do you understand the reconciliation talked about in these verses?

What great privileges we have in Christ! Aliens are now citizens. The hopeless have received hope. Those without God have found Him. The walls of division are gone. A new creation of unity has emerged. Christ Himself has become our peace. In Ephesians 2:16-18 Paul expounds upon the reality and totality of what Christ has done.

First, peace is real because Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles “to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (vs. 16, NKJV). Christ has reconciled what was irreconcilable—that is, the Jew and the Gentile. He did this, neither by impressing upon the Jews the need to accommodate the Gentiles nor by converting the Gentiles to the religious system of the Jews, which was by far superior to anything the Gentiles had. Christ accomplished the reconciliation of the Jew and the Gentile by dealing with a problem common to both—the problem of sin, which is the cause of all enmity. The Cross reconciled both Jew and Gentile with God, and that reconciliation became the basis of their unity in “one body,” which is the church without walls.

Second, the totality of the peace is underscored by the apostle in verse 18: “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (NKJV). The entire Godhead—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—is involved in this process of reconciliation and peace, both vertically with God and horizontally between people. But that’s not all. Both Jews and Gentiles have one common access to God through one Spirit. There can be no more walls separating Jews and Gentiles in either worship or fellowship.

The word access in Greek usage pictures someone being presented to the king in his throne room. Through Christ, both Gentiles and Jews—indeed, all believers—have common access to the very presence of God. Both the one who was an alien and far away and the one who was near and a citizen are ushered into the throne room of God by the same Spirit. Thus, peace and reconciliation in Christ is total and real.

Though the context here is Jew and Gentile, it could really be between any number of different groups, regardless of what divides them. What barriers stand in the way of fully realizing this ideal, and what can be done to remove them?
III. “Now Therefore” (Eph. 2:19-22)

“So then,” says the New American Standard Bible, because of the oneness the Cross has accomplished between people, and between God and sinners, no one is a foreigner in the kingdom of God, but all are “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (vs. 19). The Christ of the Cross has established the house of God, the family of God, the church of God, to which access and entry are wide open. This household was nourished and built by the “apostles and prophets,” Jesus “himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

What a divine transformation the Cross has brought about: from sin to righteousness, from alienation to fellowship, from far off to

Witnessing

Suppose that after living next door to you for more than twenty years, your neighbor announces he is arranging to have an eight-foot high, solid-board privacy fence installed around his property. His actions will cut off your view of the meadow and the stream gurgling through it. Two weeks later, the fence is in place, the view from your backyard is limited, and your relationship with your neighbor has deteriorated. You ask yourself over and over, under what possible circumstances can barriers and partitions improve, rather than tear down, relationships?

Seventh-day Adventists embrace the truth that God’s worldwide family of believers are one in His name and purpose. While geographical location may physically separate His people, the unifying thread that weaves and binds all together is God’s message of love and redemption.

Sharing with nonbelievers our full acceptance of this universal theme of oneness in Christ takes precedence over race, nationality, gender, or any other “barrier” that serves to highlight our differences rather than our similarities. Unity in Christ eliminates the need, or desire, to define others by the color of their skin, the way they dress, the language they speak, the country they call home, or their gender. Where someone is from is far less important than where she or he is heading!

Determine to make every effort this week, next week, and every week that follows to demonstrate clearly to others through your personal behavior that “Blest be the tie that binds / Our hearts in Christian love! The fellowship of kindred minds / Is like to that above. / We share our mutual woes, / Our mutual burdens bear, / And often for each other flows / The sympathizing tear. / When we asunder part, / It gives us inward pain; / But we shall still be joined in heart, / And hope to meet again.”—“Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” The Church Hymnal (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), no. 350.
“The Household of God” (Eph. 2:19-22)

From tragedy to joy. From alienation to fellowship. From Gentiles and Jews to one new humanity. The saving work of Christ has accomplished all this, and now the apostle introduces the believers to their new status. Ephesians 2:19-22 lists three attributes of that standing.

First, citizenship. Outside of Christ, Gentiles were strangers and foreigners and had no share in the “commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12). But in Christ they become “fellow citizens with the saints” (vs. 19, NKJV). The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God has two aspects. The kingdom of grace is in operation now as people repent of their sin and accept the salvation offered by Christ. The kingdom of glory will be established when Christ comes the second time to gather His saints home. Without being citizens of the first, we cannot be citizens of the second.

What are the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship? If our citizenship is in heaven, what does God expect of us here? Find verses to defend your answer.

Second, membership in God’s household. A Christian is not only a citizen but a member of God’s family. The word family evokes a relationship of closeness, equality, and dignity. Parents and children are not distant and empty shadows but share a warm and intimate relationship in which love reigns supreme. They have an obligation to one another, and together to the family; likewise, in God’s family, which is the church.

The church, says Paul, is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20, NKJV). Surely, the man who affirmed that Christ is the only foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) cannot reverse himself here in suggesting a human foundation. Christ as the Cornerstone (cf. 1 Pet. 2:6) holds together the various parts of the house, giving strength and unity to it.

If the church is like a family, how should the members treat each other? Find verses anywhere in Scripture to support your answer.

Third, we are God’s temple. The union of all believers in God and the unity between alienated groups serves the end purpose of being God’s holy sanctuary, “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22, NKJV). A church without walls becomes God’s holy temple (1 Cor. 3:16).

Write out a paragraph that envisions the ideal “church without walls.” What would that be like? How closely does your local church embody this great principle?
nearness, to unity of God’s household. All for what purpose? Paul’s exaltation knows no bounds: In Christ, we who are broken, bent, misshaped and born out of season, perfectly fit together to make the “holy temple in the Lord” a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21, 22).

The journey of grace and faith is complete: “By grace are ye saved through faith” (vs. 8). Those who were dead in sin (vs. 1) and those who gloated in their being chosen but turned unfaithful—both the Gentile and the Jew—are brought together in Christ to complete the temple of God!

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** When we travel outside our country of origin, we recognize we are foreigners. We carry a different passport, perhaps wear different styles of clothing, and even speak a different language. Describe a trip you may have taken to another country. Through the blood of Christ Jesus, we are “no longer foreigners and aliens” (Eph. 2:19, NIV) of the heavenly kingdom. What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven even while we live on this earth? How did this transformation take place?

**Thought Question:**

As the Donner party began their immigration to the West Coast of North America, their hopes ran high. However, the winter of 1846 trapped them in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, where most of them died. How is this like our situation as sinners? Discuss the good news that Christ is “our peace” who has “destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14, NIV). How does your church model unity and inclusiveness?

**Application Question:**

December 25 is fast approaching. Many people in our world are planning to give gifts to friends and loved ones. How is the environment that grants the gift of grace different from the holiday environment? Contrast our utter unworthiness to receive a gift from God with His willingness to grant it. Reread Romans 5:12-18 several times. Ask class members to share which concepts in these verses touch them personally, and why. How can we be God’s hearts and hands to continue His type of gift giving in our world? In a season of prayer with your Sabbath School class, ask God to impress each member with a specific mission of mercy to perform this week.
**Further Study:** *Prejudice and disunity.* “The same agencies that barred men away from Christ eighteen hundred years ago are at work today. The spirit which built up the partition wall between Jew and Gentile is still active. Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different classes of men. Christ and His mission have been misrepresented, and multitudes feel that they are virtually shut away from the ministry of the gospel. But let them not feel that they are shut away from Christ. There are no barriers which man or Satan can erect but that faith can penetrate. . . .

“Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. . . . Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. “Therefore remember . . .” says Ephesians 2:11 (NKJV). Why does Paul want us to remember our past condition? Cf. Deut. 15:15, 16:12, 32:7. Have those who are willing talk about what Christ has spared them from and the great changes He has wrought in their lives. Though it’s not good to dwell on the past too much, why is it good to remember what we have come out of?

2. Mahatma Gandhi once observed that as long as Christians practice caste, Hindus have no need to worry about getting converted. How have Christians been guilty of practicing the caste system? What does this say about racism’s effect on religion? In what ways has racism impacted even our own church?

3. Peace with God and peace with one another form the basis of Christian life and relationship. There’s only one problem: A great deal of division and disunity exists within the Christian church itself. How can you explain this discrepancy and what can be done to help heal it?

4. There will, of course, in heaven be none of the kind of hateful divisions we have here on earth. What does this tell us about how important it is for us to work at getting rid of such divisions now?
God’s Mystery: The Universal Fellowship

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20, 21, NKJV).

Mystery revealed and proclaimed. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul has already written about the unique unity Christ has established in the church. Writers before him have written about unity, but usually it was about unity among a single people, not among various classes, races, and nationalities, an idea that was all but unheard of in the ancient world. But Paul has written about a different kind of unity, one the world up to that point had never seen, the unity that comes through Christ.

Yet, he doesn’t end there. He talks also about the church composed of these Jews and Gentiles and about what the Lord will do through this church. Most important, Paul points his readers to the love of God who has accomplished so many things for us through the sacrifice of Jesus.

The Week at a Glance: Why did Paul deem it such a “mystery” (Eph. 3:3) that Gentiles could also be partakers of God’s promises in Christ? Why should this have not been such a mystery to him? What is the church to reveal to heavenly powers? What are the things God has done for us through Christ? What is Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.
The Contents of the Mystery (Eph. 3:1-6)

Look up the following texts. How do they help us understand why for Paul this unity was such a mystery? Deut. 14:2, Matt. 10:5, John 4:9, Acts 10:26-28, Gal. 2:11-14.

“Mystery” in the New Testament usage is not some hidden secret but a truth, heretofore unknown, that has been revealed by God in His own time through the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks of receiving such a revelation (Eph. 3:3). As Barclay comments: “Into [Paul’s] life had come the revelation of the great secret of God. That secret was that the love and mercy and grace of God were meant not for the Jews alone but for all mankind. . . . In the ancient world the barriers were complete. No one had ever dreamed that God’s privileges were for all people.” —William Barclay, The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1976), pp. 122, 123.

Years ago American patriot Thomas Jefferson wrote the famous words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . . .” However nice the sentiment, history shows that this view was anything but “self-evident.” On the contrary, all through history various groups believed themselves greater than, and superior to, other nations and people. This idea was so ingrained that even the ancient Israelites—who should have known better because of the revelation given them by God—were contaminated with this sense of self-superiority. Hence, someone as bright, as diligent, and as studious as Paul needed a divine revelation to purge him of his native prejudices. For him, the idea that Jews and Gentiles would be one was so incredible that he deemed it a “mystery,” a concept hard for most of us today to grasp (Why should this be a “mystery”?), because, in our day and age, these kinds of ethnic and national and cultural concepts of superiority, though existing, are looked down upon. Even if someone were to think themselves better than others because of their nationality or race or culture, it’s considered in very bad taste to express such a view. Thus, only as we come to understand a bit of the mind-set of Paul’s time can we grasp just how radical this idea of unity between Jews and Gentiles was to him.

In what ways might you harbor a sense of cultural or ethnic superiority? (Few cultures, if any, are immune to this problem.) Why are such concepts so contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ?
Key Text: *Ephesians 3:3-6*

Teachers Aims:
1. To stress that only Christ through His church is capable of bringing humans into unity with one another, and with God.
2. To emphasize that this unity is a “mystery” to the world, because it is so foreign to human thinking.
3. To understand that this unity can exist only among a group of individuals who have taken God into their hearts.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Great Mystery (*Eph. 3:3*)
   A. In New Testament usage, the term *mystery* is, in fact, something not previously known that has been revealed.
   B. Christ has revealed His plan for unity in the church, a body He directly created.
   C. Paul himself found these acts of God puzzling, but wonderful.

II. For All People (*Eph. 3:6*)
   A. Christ’s call for human unity can be seen in the Old Testament but was often ignored.
   B. Like many of the other claims of the gospel, unity in Christ is not natural and, to many, unpalatable.
   C. Ethnic/national chauvinism was quite open and rampant in Paul’s time, and it cannot be said that it has disappeared in the present age.

III. Christ in Our Hearts (*Eph. 3:17*)
   A. The church, while a collective, is composed of individuals who have been remolded in God’s image.
   B. The church, in its unity, is a demonstration/manifestation of God’s power.
   C. God’s love dwelling in us and His church also gives us the wisdom to accomplish/understand things that are otherwise impossible to accomplish or incomprehensible.

Summary: Strife between people is a result of sin. God’s message is intended to bring about unity and reconciliation. This should be evident in the church and can be accomplished only by God and people who have yielded to Him.

COMMENTARY

Scholars before and after Paul have written about unity, but usually it is about unity among a single group. No Greek philosopher, no Roman poet, no Jewish rabbi, no Hindu pandit has written about unity of differing people groups: free and slave, Greek and barbarian, Jew and Gentile, Brahman and the untouchable. But Paul’s
Evidences for the Mystery

Though Paul talks about the gospel going to the Gentiles as a “mystery,” evidences of this promise were scattered in the Old Testament. Look up the following texts. How do they express the idea of the truth about God going to all nations?

Gen. 18:18

Isa. 42:6

Isa. 49:6

Isa. 56:3-8

Isa. 60:3

Jer. 16:19

Zech. 8:23

It’s a sad but powerful testimony to realize the hold that ethnic, cultural, or religious prejudice can have on our minds that even with the above texts, and more, Paul thought it a great “mystery” that the Gentiles should also be brought into the truth about God. Again, it’s a thought that most Christians today, the vast majority being Gentiles, take for granted; it’s hard, from this perspective, to realize how radical an idea this was for someone of the background and education of Paul.

But then, again, we shouldn’t be surprised, should we? The gospel teaches us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44), to bless those who curse us (vs. 44), to turn the other cheek (vs. 39), to not render evil for evil (1 Pet. 3:9), and so forth. In other words, many of the claims of the gospel are radical, going against our basic nature, cutting across some of the most ingrained and accepted cultural, ethnic, and political prejudices we have. If our toes haven’t been stepped on, in one way or another, by Jesus, then we probably haven’t met Him as we should.

When was the last time Jesus stepped on your toes; that is, when was the last time you felt the claims of the gospel cut deep into some of your prejudices or passions? How did you respond?
concept of unity of people groups of all kinds is inconceivable to
the human mind. It required the divine act of the Cross breaking
down the wall of partition and providing forgiveness and reconcilia-
tion to Jew and Gentile alike.

Such a unity is nothing short of a divine miracle: a mystery, as
Paul calls it several times (Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9). In this lesson we
study that mystery: its contents, its stewardship, and its results.

I. The Mystery: Its Contents (Eph. 3:1-6)
The New Testament uses the word mystery to indicate not some-
thing secretive but rather a great truth that was hidden in the past
(Eph. 3:9). But now God has chosen to reveal the mystery through
Christ and the Spirit, and through them to Paul and the apostles and
the prophets (see Eph. 3:5-7). The revelation of the mystery has
turned the Gentiles to be (1) fellow heirs, (2) members of the same
body, and (3) partakers of the promise (vs. 6). All are in Christ Jesus.

That the Gentiles should be heirs together with the Jews in a new
fellowship in Jesus was God’s purpose from the days of Creation
(Eph. 3:9). Here, Paul, by revelation, is presenting a principle—all
humankind is one in Christ. God’s revelation answers life’s great
questions, one such being splintered humanity. No history or phi-
losophy or religion outside of this revelation can grasp the deep and
abiding meaning of the mystery of oneness. As a solution to human
disunity, Greeks may have conceived eternal recurrence, Rome may
have built law and civilization, Marx may have projected classless
economics, Nietzsche may have built his superman, Hinduism may
have its cyclic karma—but none could do away with sin, the root of
human disharmony. Biblical revelation alone has the solution to
shatter the wall of division and create a fellowship in which all are
heirs together.

Heirs of what? “Of the same body” and “partakers of his prom-
ise” (Eph. 3:6). Common membership in the church, coming
together to participate in the same “broken” body of Christ and the
shed blood of the Redeemer, transcends all hatred and disharmony
and makes us partakers of the same promise of eternal life and
heavenly citizenship—despite one’s sociology or genealogy or
nationality.

II. The Mystery: Its Stewardship (Eph. 3:7-13)
Paul equates this mystery with the gospel (Eph. 3:6). Of this
gospel he was called to be a servant filled with gratitude and humil-
ity. Ministry requires both. Humility leads Paul to position himself
as “less than the least of all saints” (vs. 8; see also 1 Cor. 15:9).
Gratitude to the gospel becomes the core of his ministry. Indeed,
Paul considers his own ministry a wonder: Why would God choose
a legalist to proclaim free grace, an anti-Christian gestapo leader
against the early church to be its greatest defender, and a Pharisee
Through the Church (Eph. 3:9-13)

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10).

Read the text for today. What incredible message is Paul giving us in this one verse?

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Read Ephesians 3:9-13. Notice what theme Paul links in with the plan of salvation in verse 9. Why is this theme so important?

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We’re new creations in Christ (see also 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15, Eph. 4:24), and we are also part of the church that God Himself has created. He made us, He remakes us, and He made the church of which we, as new creatures, are a part. And it’s through this church, composed of beings remade in His image, that His wisdom is revealed to the universe (Eph. 3:10).

Indeed, this new community, the church God has created, becomes a cosmic exhibit of His power, His grace, and His “wisdom,” which defeated the divisive forces of Satan, “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11, NKJV). If it is through creation that God reveals His power to us, it is through new creation that God reveals His wisdom and justice to “principalities and powers” (vs. 10), including fallen and unfallen angels.

“Not to this world only but to the universe are we to make manifest the principles of His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 13.

In this one text, Ephesians 3:10, we are given another look at the whole issue of the great controversy; we are shown the interest of other cosmic intelligences in the fate of our world here. What’s even more astounding is that according to this text, it’s God’s purpose that through the church His “wisdom” will be made manifest to these other intelligences.

Imagine you were part of these “principalities and powers” from somewhere in the cosmos who were watching the church. Write a diary entry about what you saw there. Compare notes in class this Sabbath.
to be an apostle to the Gentiles? The call to ministry is ever a wonder. Its effectiveness depends on never forgetting the Source of its calling and the purpose of its mission.

As this mystery’s steward, the apostle was ever mindful of his audience and message: first, an earthly audience that they might know “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8) and the magnificent “fellowship of the mystery” (vs. 9), which is God’s church on earth; second, audiences in the heavenly places that all the cosmic powers might know that through the church “the manifold wisdom of God” is manifest (vs. 10) and that the cosmic conflict has come to its final stage.

Why does Paul emphasize so much the preaching of this mystery? There are two reasons. First, this was “the eternal purpose which he [God] purposed in Christ” (vs. 11); second, because of this mystery, both Gentiles and Jews have boldness and access to approach the very presence of God.

III. The Mystery: Its Results
In addition to human unity and cosmic glorification of God’s

Inductive Bible Study


1 What “treasured possession” (Deut. 14:2, NIV) would someone find in your house? God used this phrase to define Israel. Empowered by the realization of their own unworthiness and His indwelling Spirit, God desired that they would bless others (see Gen. 18:18). What causes us to become spoiled children instead of God’s emissaries of truth? How can He help us learn to value others as He values us and them?

2 Jesus left heaven to rescue lost humanity. How would you paint a picture, write a song, or create a sculpture to portray the amazing depth of what that sacrifice describes? How have the radical claims of the gospel transformed your thoughts, words, and behavior to become evident in your life? In what ways can your neighbors see Jesus’ salvation displayed in your life?

3 Look up the definitions of the words community and church. How are the definitions the same? How are they different? Paul describes the church as a change agent (Eph. 3:9-12). How has your community of faith impacted your neighborhood, town, or city to God’s glory? If you believe more could be done, what practical things could you do as a class to become a more effective witness to God’s grace?
“Wherefore”

Notice the wonderful promise in Ephesians 3:12; according to Paul, through Jesus we have “access”; that is, access to God Himself. This is what Jesus was talking about in John 10:9 when He said that “I am the door.” Adam had free access to God at first but, having lost it, he hid himself among the trees of the Garden because he could no longer face God with frankness and a clear conscience. The effect of redemption is to restore to humanity a new and bold access to God without fear or restriction and without the need of any intermediaries such as priests or saints or ritual. God is immediately accessible to the trusting soul, through the merits of Christ.

Paul then starts verse 13 with the word wherefore, which, in the Greek, also means “on account of.” In other words, he is saying that “on account of” something, he doesn’t want the Ephesians to worry about him. What is that wherefore referring to?

Because the Gentiles now belong to the body of Christ, because the eternal purpose is being fulfilled through Jesus, because God’s wisdom is being revealed to the universe, and because we have free access to God, Paul asks his readers not to be too distressed over his sufferings, which have come to him on account of his bringing them the gospel.

In other words, Paul is saying “Don’t focus on me or my trials; focus on the great news of what God has done for the world through Jesus Christ. The good news far overshadows anything I might be going through.”

Struggling? Worried? Fearful about the future? Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the things as revealed to us in this Epistle so far, things Christ has done. Let the reality of the promises we have been reading about overshadow all else in your life. Claim these promises as your own.
witnessing

Human suffering has been present on this planet ever since the gates of Eden permanently closed behind our first earthly parents. As a result of Adam and Eve’s fall from grace, pain, misery, and misfortune have dogged the inhabitants of our little world through the centuries.

None has escaped the heartache that accompanies living in a sinful world. For many, it is the normal course of their daily lives. Growing up alone, without parents or caregivers; scrambling for food; sleeping wherever and whenever possible is the expected childhood for millions of children around the globe.

Natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, droughts, etc.) serve only to intensify human suffering through loss of life, shelter, and food. While some areas of the world have sufficient resources to recover from such horrific events, many do not. And the shockwave of sin continues.

Our study this week points out that no matter how difficult things appear to be for us at any given time, we have only to focus on Calvary to better understand the meaning of true suffering. It is beyond comprehension that He allowed His life to be taken in such a manner.

As Christians, we comprehend that the only way for each and every one of us to receive the precious gift of eternal life was for the cherished Son of God to come to this earth in human form, bear our sins, and die an unspeakable death in order for our death sentence to be lifted and Heaven’s promise to be opened to us.

This week, pay careful attention to those around you who appear to be suffering, whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Ask if they will let you pray with them. Let them know that if they will take time to listen, you have a story to tell them that will permanently lift their burden and place it on Another’s shoulders. Then they will never again have to carry that burden alone.
The Knowledge of His Love (Eph. 3:14-21)

Read Paul’s prayer (Eph. 3:14-21) over and over. Then paraphrase the essence of His petition. What is he praying for, and why do you think he would offer such a prayer?

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Paul prays that Christ would dwell in their hearts. The Greek word used for “dwell” is katoikem, which indicates permanent residence. Christ is not a guest but a perpetual part of our lives.

Paul prays for the indwelling Christ so the strengthened inner being “may be able to comprehend” (that is, empowered and enlightened to grasp) the width, length, depth, and height of Christ’s love (vss. 18, 19). Paul is praying to comprehend the incomprehensible, but he knows that the assurance of the believer rests only in such uninterrupted meditation of God’s love. The believers must know with what great love they have been blessed. While Christ’s love cannot be fitted into any geometrical measure, it is wide enough to circle the globe and reach every sinner. It is high enough to reach the very throne room of God. It is deep enough to plumb Satan’s deepest gutter and pull out from that mess any sinner who calls upon Christ for help and bring him or her to stand under God’s sunshine. It is long enough to stretch from “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) to endless ages of eternity, where that love will be the subject of saints’ study. It is a love that “passes all knowledge” and fills all the believers “with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19, NKJV).

“Fullness of God” is an expression lavish in assurance and is common to the books of Ephesians and Colossians. It signifies that God is beyond limitation. He “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (vs. 20, NKJV). Rich in mercy, unfathomable in love, limitless in grace, and abundant in power, God has committed the entire resources of heaven to grant “above all that we ask or think” in order that His glory may be manifest “in the church . . . to all generations” (vss. 20, 21, NKJV).

How certain are you of the reality of God’s love? If someone were to ask “Why do you believe that your God is so loving?” what would you answer? How convincing a case could you make?
by using two metaphors: botanical and architectural (Eph. 3:17). To a Christian, God’s love is as essential as a root is to the tree and as a strong foundation is to a house. Loving the unlovable, the undeserving, loving to the point of dying for another (as exemplified and made possible in Christ [Rom. 5:8]) should become the rooting and grounding of the Christian life.

3. Another practical blessing of the mystery is the comprehension of the breadth, length, depth, and height of Christ’s love and an understanding of the fullness of God (Eph. 3:18, 19) with all His saints. Note the last phrase. An isolated Christian is incomplete in the knowledge of the things of God. In fellowship and unity, the believer finds strength to live and appreciate the fullness of God’s love, although its full comprehension may be the work of eternity.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Education is about helping students discover mysteries: concepts and ideas they have never before experienced or understood. Share a time in first grade when you discovered something new. Through Christ, God has revealed the mystery that all people can have fellowship in the church and, ultimately, in the heaven to come. Why was it so hard for ancient Israel to accept this new knowledge? How do we get caught “wearing blinders” even as God seeks to draw us out of our comfort zones?

**Thought Question:** The concept of power usually is about the ability to rule over or to direct someone else. Do a word study of the word power in the Bible. How does God use His power? Why is it so critical for us to allow God’s power to work in us (Eph. 3:7, 20)? Share some of the results of God’s power in your life.

**Application Question:** In Ephesians 3, Paul shares the profound mystery of complete acceptance in Christ. “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Eph. 3:12, NIV). This access is based on grasping the wonder and magnitude of God’s love; its width, breadth, height, and depth (vs. 18). How have you personally experienced God’s love? What does it mean to be completely unworthy of salvation yet to be invited into His fellowship? How would our local churches change if we allowed God to change our current ways of thinking and doing regarding the unlovely, challenging people of this world? How does God help us to forgive and to fellowship with those who have hurt or slandered us?
Further Study: Access to God. “We have access to God through the merits of the name of Christ, and God invites us to bring to Him our trials and temptations; for He understands them all. He would not have us pour out our woes to human ears. Through the blood of Christ we may come to the throne of grace, and find grace to help in time of need. . . . As an earthly parent encourages his child to come to him at all times, so the Lord encourages us to lay before Him our wants and perplexities, our gratitude and love. Every promise is sure. Jesus is our Surety and Mediator, and has placed at our command every resource, that we may have a perfect character. The blood of Christ in ever-abiding efficacy is our only hope; for through His merits alone we have pardon and peace.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1116.

Discussion Questions:

1. “We have not merely been saved that we might escape hell; we have been saved in order that God may present a people which will astonish the whole world,” said a great preacher. How well do you think the church has succeeded in doing what this preacher has said?

2. Compare your “alien diaries” (see Tuesday’s study).

3. Dwell on Ephesians 3:10 as a class. Discuss the implications of that text in light of the great controversy. How do the opening two chapters of Job parallel with what that verse is saying?

4. Let individual members of the class give a personal testimony regarding their own experience on knowing God’s love. What can you learn from the different testimonies?

5. If someone who had been attending your class is no longer coming to church, what can you do, as a class, to reveal to that person some of the love Paul so eloquently talks about in this chapter?
Lesson 8

Unity Amid Diversity

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 28:18-20, Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:28-31, Eph. 4:1-16.

Memory Text: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6, NKJV).

We have reached the midpoint of the Epistle. The first three chapters set forth the theology of Christian unity, a unity that overrides all the divisive factors in humankind. The last three chapters deal with the practical implications of that unity in the life of a Christian. So, Paul moves from theology to practice, from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done to what we should do in response to what God has done for us. Our theology must inform our morality, and our morality must reflect our theology.

Thus, Paul now turns his attention to the kind of life believers should live in accordance with the great theological insight of the mystery of Christ. The Jew/Gentile unity is no myth but a reality that demands a “walk worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1, NKJV).

The Week at a Glance: Why does Paul tell us to “walk worthy” of our calling? What does that mean? What kind of diversity will exist amid the unity that should be the hallmark of God’s church? What are the gifts given to individuals in the church? How does Paul describe growth in Christ?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 19.
Walking Worthy *(Eph. 4:1-3)*

In the first three chapters, Paul talked so much about what God has done in Christ for us. Now, as a result, he tells us to “walk worthy” of our vocation, and he tells us how we should do that. What are the five graces foundational to Christian character, and what is your understanding of what each one means? *(Eph. 4:2, 3). Compare what you wrote to what the lesson below says.

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Lowliness or humility. Romans and Greeks considered humility as a sign of weakness, but to the Christian, it is a source of strength. It is the opposite of pride. Pride is at the center of disunity (e.g., Lucifer in heaven), whereas humility is at the core of reconciliation as in the Incarnation and the Cross *(Phil. 2:2-8)*.

Gentleness or meekness is essential to the unity of the church. Being the denial of self-assertion, meekness does not react even in the face of provocation. In the end the meek will inherit the earth *(Matt. 5:5)*.

Patience or longsuffering is a characteristic of God Himself. He is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” *(2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV)*. Patience means endurance in the face of affliction, refusal to avenge wrongs, and not giving up hope for repairing ruptured relationships.

“Bearing with one another” *(Eph. 4:2, NKJV)* means more than mutual tolerance. It involves understanding the other person and a willingness to forgive and accept one another.

All these graces, of course, are rooted in love, and it is this active practice of love that preserves relationships and promotes peace and unity in the Christian community and beyond.

Humility, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and love—how well did you manifest any of these traits in the past week? If there were something you could do over again, what would it be? More important, how can you avoid making the same mistake again?
**Key Text:** Ephesians 4:3-6

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To demonstrate how God brings unity of the church from the real diversity of the individuals and groups within it.
2. To explore the diversity within the unity of the church.
3. To discuss the purposes of that diversity and how it helps to accomplish unity.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Walking Worthy** *(Eph. 4:1, 2)*
   A. In order for the church to live up to its calling, individuals in the church must cooperate with God.
   B. God’s grace provides us with the character traits necessary to fulfill His purpose.
   C. These character traits arise from God’s love manifested within believers.

II. **Diversity, not Division** *(Eph. 4:11)*
   A. Unity does not, in any sense, mean “sameness” or “enforced conformity.”
   B. Each of us is given different gifts and personal qualities, all of which can be used by God to build the unity of the church.
   C. Gifts are the result of God’s filling and transforming our personal strengths and qualities.

III. **Equipped for Ministry** *(Eph. 4:12)*
   A. Ministry, as discussed by Paul in Ephesians, does not strictly refer to the pastoral ministry.
   B. All church members are ministers, using their gifts to build the church and serve its mission.
   C. Gifts also are intended to help the recipient to grow spiritually in Christ.

**Summary:** God is a God of unity but also a God of variety. This can be seen in His creation. God has drawn people of all backgrounds, talents, temperaments, et cetera, to Him. In the human world, human variation is often viewed as a problem to overcome. God views it as an opportunity to make use of the entire human spectrum to take His message to the world.

**COMMENTARY**

“I point you to the words of the apostle Paul in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. This whole chapter is a lesson that God desires us to learn and practice.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1117.

In Ephesians, chapter 4, Paul begins the practical application of the theology outlined in chapters 1–3. The action of God’s grace must be followed by human response. “Therefore,” Paul begins. Doctrine is not an empty rhetoric; it is the “therefore,” the foundation,
Unity: Why Oneness? (Eph. 4:4-6)

Read Ephesians 4:4-6. What’s the one crucial theme in these three verses, a theme we’ve already seen in this Epistle so far?

Ephesians 4:4-6 is one of the most majestic passages in the Bible. The structure of its construction, the grandeur of its prose, and the grounding of unity in the fullness of the Godhead are incredible. Should anyone dare ask the question “Why should Christians be one?” the answer comes in that unassailable argument: Because everything about Christian faith and life is one.

God has mandated the unity of the Christian body. One God through one Christ has redeemed us from sin, given to us one faith, regenerated us through one Spirit, made us members of one body through one baptism, and given to us one eternal hope.

As we study this sevenfold formula of oneness, another significant factor needs to be noted. The entire Godhead is involved in the oneness of the church. That is in keeping with the spirit of the Epistle, which often emphasizes the role of the Trinity in redemptive history.

God the Father—“who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6, NKJV). He is all in all.

God the Son—“the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2, NIV), “the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), the foundation of the church, His body.

God the Holy Spirit—the agency of our new-birth experience, which leads us to baptism (1 Cor. 12:13).

“In the fourth chapter of Ephesians the plan of God is so plainly and simply revealed that all His children may lay hold upon the truth. Here the means which He has appointed to keep unity in His church, that its members may reveal to the world a healthy religious experience, is plainly declared.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1117.

“Satan separates. God unites. Love binds us together.” So said the famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody. No one would like to be an agent of Satan, and all of us would like to be instruments of God’s love. Why are the five graces talked about in yesterday’s lesson so crucial in order for us to experience this unity that is discussed in today’s lesson?
of Christian ethics and practice. The apostle calls that practice “the
worthy walk” (Eph. 4:1). Ephesians 4:1-16 covers the characteristics,
the purpose, and the empowerment of that walk.

I. The Christian Walk: Its Characteristics
(Eph. 4:1, 2)

The apostle expects the believers’ response to God’s saving act
to be “worthy of the calling you have received” (vs. 1, NIV). The
Greek word for “worthy” (axios) refers to a balance. The Christian
walk needs to be in balance with the calling.

Paul mentions four characteristics that contribute to this balance.
First, lowliness or humility. Romans and Greeks never viewed the
word humility in admiration but as descriptive of servility and sub-
servience. Not so the Bible. Isaiah describes God as transcendent as
well as immanent: “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity”
and One who dwells “with him also that is of a contrite and humble
spirit” (Isa. 57:15). It was the mind of humility that led Jesus to
empty Himself and take the form of a servant and humble Himself
to the point of death (Phil. 2:5-8). Humility—voluntary self-
abnegation—is an indispensable part of the Christian life. It looks at
life in a perspective of sinfulness and emptiness, the redeeming
grace of Christ, and the all-embracing love of God, without whom
life is not.

Second, meekness. Both Roman and Greek cultures considered,
and most of today’s cultures concur, that meekness is a symbol of
weakness. But in the Bible, meekness is inner strength, derived
from a quality of gentleness. Not arrogant or condescending, meek-
ness is gentle with others, sensitive to their weakness, and support-
ive of them so that they can climb higher. Moses reflected such a
character. He was no spineless leader, but the Bible declares him to
be the meekest man on earth (Num. 12:3). Did not Jesus say
“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5)?

Third, longsuffering and forbearing. A natural pair, both words
mean “patience.” God Himself has set an example of patience and
longsuffering toward us (2 Pet. 3:9). Christian community and unity
cannot exist in the absence of patience and tolerance. Patience
involves bearing with one another, a readiness to forgive, a refusal
to cross swords or take revenge, and a readiness to embrace love.

Fourth, love. The crown jewel that should mark the Christian
walk is indeed basic to all others. It is the sum of all virtues. “The
strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable

II. The Christian Walk: Its Purpose (Eph. 4:2-7)

A walk worthy of our calling is essential to “keep the unity of the
Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). This unity of the Christian
community—of Jews and Gentiles—is an inescapable mandate,
Unity: Diversity of Gifts (1 Cor. 12:28-31, Eph. 4:7-11)

Ephesians 4:6 speaks of God as the “Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (NKJV). The emphasis that we all have the same father stresses the unity of the church. Now in verse 7, Paul says that “to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (NKJV). All have not received the same gift, nor in the same measure (vs. 11). Thus, Paul turns from “all of us” (vs. 6) to “each one of us” (vs. 7)—and so from unity to diversity in the church. Diversity does not mean division; it means there are different gifts, and these gifts should be used for the unity of the church. After all, the same Spirit that distributes the gifts allows us to work together for the strengthening and building of God’s church.

Read Ephesians 4:7-11. What is Paul telling us here? How do these words help us understand the gifts He has given us?

“When He ascended on high” (vs. 8, NKJV), He gave gifts to the believers; that is, when He ascended to heaven, He poured out the Spirit on the earth. But what are we to understand by verse 9, where Paul states: “He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth” (NKJV)? The contrast between “ascended” and “descended” is not spatial but theological. His ascent and exaltation to the presence of God is contrasted with His descent to, and deepest humiliation of, the Cross (Phil. 2:5-11). The victory in the descent and the exaltation in the ascent are celebrated by the giving of the gifts to the church, whose members Christ has plucked from the prince of darkness. By His victory over Satan and His ascent to “far above all the heavens” (Eph. 4:10, NKJV), Christ fills all things. He is the Lord of the universe and yet linked closely with the church on earth and fills her with His gifts.

Name the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11. Compare these with gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-31. What does Paul say about the nature and use of gifts? At the same time, ask yourself, “What is my gift? How have I used it recently? What practical ways can I enhance my gift in order to make it more effective in the Lord’s work?”
because everything about the gospel is one. Paul repeats the formula of one seven times and applies it to the church, the Holy Spirit, the hope, the Lord, the faith, the baptism, and God the Father. The entire Godhead is involved in creating the oneness of the faith, hope, baptism, and the church as a cosmic exhibit of God’s victory over the spirit of division that Satan introduced into the universe at the beginning of the great controversy. The least we, as members of the body of Christ—the church—can do is to remain united and loyal to God’s eternal purposes.

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** John 17:11, 22, 23; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11

1. Walking requires forward motion. Why would Paul use this concept when addressing the practical implications of the Christian journey? *(See Eph. 4:1-3.)* Paul presents five “steps,” or attributes, that reflect our calling in Christ. Discuss the impact of each one. How does living these attributes help make the gospel more appealing to non-Christians?

2. The concept of oneness is foreign to our natures and society. We each have a “better idea.” In what ways does Ephesians 4:4-6 use the concept of “one”? Discuss how unity in these areas impacts the testimony of the church *(see also John 17:11, 22, 23.)* Why is it so easy for us to fall prey to divisions and conflicting ideologies? How does God heal divisions? Share a season of prayer asking for “the unity of the Spirit” *(Eph. 4:3, NIV)* in your church.

3. Discuss the phrase *unity in diversity.* How do the spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, Ephesians 4:7-11 make unity in diversity possible? Also read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Why is it essential that we each know and practice our spiritual gifts? Discuss how your class can be a catalyst to help every church member discover and use their gifts.

4. Newly planted young trees are anchored with ropes until their root system develops. Reread Ephesians 4:13-16. Why is it so important that we be fully committed to God? Where do we find truth solid enough to keep us thoroughly grounded, no matter what storm or strange doctrine develops? How can you learn to be discerning when confronted with new ideologies?
We have just been studying the gifts the Lord has given His church. Paul then lists, in Ephesians 4:12, two reasons for those gifts. What are they? How do they relate to each other?

The first deals with “the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (NKJV). The Greek for “equipping” comes from a word that means “to put right,” such as mending a torn net (Matt. 4:21) or setting a broken bone. Thus, “equipping of the saints” refers to preparing, training, and making them ready for the service to which they are called.

This raises the question, Who are the ministers of the church? According to the New Testament, all Christians are ministers, commissioned by the Lord Himself to go, make disciples of all nations, baptize, and teach (Matt. 28:18-20). The work of the ministry is not committed to a privileged few (clergy) but to all who profess the name of Christ. The Christian ministry is a people-to-people, one-to-one, ministry. No church member can claim exemption from the ministry, and no clergy person can claim exclusive privilege to the ministry.

The second reason for the giving of the gifts is “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12, NKJV). Whatever gifts we have—teaching, preaching, evangelism, healing, counseling, visiting, comforting, helping—are not to be hoarded for personal use. They are for the corporate good and growth of the church, and the hoarders will have their gifts taken from them (Matt. 25:24-30). The church can grow only when its members love and care for one another and together reach out to the surrounding community with the grace and love of Christ. Ministry of all members will hasten the day when the entire globe will be encircled by the saving message of Christ. In this way the church will exercise “the unity of the faith” and will receive the “fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, NKJV). A person filled with Christ cannot remain silent when someone out there is without Christ. That is the motive of ministry.

Imagine what your local church would be like if everyone, using his or her gifts, were involved in the work of ministry. What can you do to help move your church toward this gospel ideal?
III. The Christian Walk: Its Empowerment  
(Eph. 4:11-16)

How are we to walk worthy of our calling? The risen Jesus, after ascending to His Father, has not left us without help. He has given us gifts so that we, as a believing community, can not only walk in His way faithfully but accomplish His mission (Eph. 4:8-11). The gifts are many, and Paul names only a few—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—but the purpose and function of all spiritual gifts remain the same: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (vs. 12).

In exercising the varied gifts, we need to remember that we are the saints, we are the ministers, and we, together, constitute the body of Christ. As such, our vocation and our “worthy walk” must take us to a greater maturity “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Witnessing

What might the impact be on you, and others, if during the coming week you engage in something similar to the following:

1. Volunteer one afternoon at the community HIV/AIDS center.
2. Offer to babysit your next-door neighbor’s two-year-old so the child’s single mom can attend a much-needed job interview.
3. Join the one-evening-per-week tutoring program for inner-city kids at the local youth center.
4. Visit one afternoon with a terminally ill person under hospice care.
5. Repair the front porch steps of an elderly man living alone down the street.
6. Invite the family who just moved into the neighborhood to attend church with you on Sabbath and stay for fellowship dinner.

We have the life of Jesus here on earth as our example: He fed the people, soothed their physical wounds, washed the feet of His disciples, sat with the littlest ones, enjoyed telling stories, took time to listen, and, most important, never missed an opportunity to share His Father’s love and the plan of salvation. He knew that the best way to reach people, to pry open their mind and heart was to appeal to what they knew and understood, what personally touched them and affected their daily lives.

This coming week, think of a way you can be involved, a way you can reach out to others in your office or community. Then actually do it; and as you do it, take note of the impact your involvement is having on you and those you are helping. Ask God to help you make such activities a part of your life.
Unity: Growing Up in Christ (Eph. 4:14-16)

Ephesians 4:12, 13 closes with the note that spiritual gifts are given not only to equip the saints for the ministry of the church but also to lead them to the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (NKJV). Coming to Christ, experiencing the unity that transcends all divisions and being equipped for the ministry are not enough. Christians must grow in Christ. Verses 14-16 outline elements of such growth. (Verses 17-32, our study next week, continue to define this growth to emphasize living as the new person in full maturity.)

**Ephesians** 4:14 says we should “be no more children.” How do we understand this with Christ’s words in Matthew 18:3?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

God wants us to be childlike but not childish. He expects us to “put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11) and assert the maturity of adulthood with which one can make a distinction between the spiritual and the worldly and take solid food instead of milk (1 Cor. 3:2).

What else is Paul warning us about in verse 14? How well have you fared in this area?

Firmness involves stability in what we believe, in how we sift truth from error, and in not being deceived by those who claim to have the truth. It requires strong grounding in God’s Word so that when the “trickery,” “craftiness,” and “plotting” (Eph. 4:14, NKJV) confront us, we may stand firm on God’s testimony (Isa. 8:20).

Paul also talks about “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Literally, it is doing the truth. And doing it in love. The church must distinguish between the gospel and heresy, and even here truth must put on love. “Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth.”—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 172.

Finally, the ultimate sign of growth is unreserved commitment and obedience to Christ. We are the body, and every part and function of the body must be linked to, and integrated in, Christ.

Is “truth” still “truth” even if spoken in harshness? Defend your answer.
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Babies attract us. They are our offspring and our hope. What did you look like as a baby? Share one story your parents told you about something cute you did as a very little child. Why is it important that we “no longer be infants” *(Eph. 4:14, NIV)*? Compare your spiritual journey now with when it began. How have you matured in your walk with Jesus?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Ephesians 4:2 reflects Galatians 5:22, 23, where Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit. How is it possible for humans to change from being self-centered and egotistical to people who are patient and kind, even when wrongly accused? What does it mean to be “completely humble and gentle” *(Eph. 4:2, NIV)*? If your family or church community were describing your personality, what adjectives would they use?

2. Do a word study on unity in the Bible. Jesus’ concern and prayer for His disciples is that they be one as a testimony to the world of the gospel’s power to change lives. *See John 17:11, 22, 23.* Paul echos this profound concept, urging us to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” *(Eph. 4:3, NIV).* Why are there so many divisions of faith and practice? How has this condition in our society affected the fulfillment of the gospel commission? How can your local church change your city’s perception of Christianity?

**Application Question:**

The concept of spiritual gifts is so important to Paul that he mentions them in three Epistles. *(See Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:28-31, Eph. 4:11-13.)* How are spiritual gifts different from a person’s natural talents? Why must people be prepared “for works of service” *(Eph. 4:12, NIV)*? Do you know your spiritual gifts? If you do not, how can you discover them? If you do understand the special ways in which God has gifted you to serve, how does your current role in the church match your giftedness? How are you “cheerfully” advancing the kingdom of God? *(See Rom. 12:8, NIV)*
Further Study: Spiritual gifts. “It is the absence of the Spirit that makes the gospel ministry so powerless. Learning, talents, eloquence, every natural or acquired endowment, may be possessed; but without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner be won to Christ. On the other hand, if they are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, the poorest and most ignorant of His disciples will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them the channel for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

Christian growth. “The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a beautiful figure of Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace; there can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the development of the Christian life. At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. . . . We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges.”—Pages 65, 66.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss in class the question asked at the end of Thursday’s lesson.

2. Look at the Ellen White quote above where she says that at every stage of development we may be “perfect.” What does that mean?

3. Read again Ephesians 4:14. How important is doctrinal purity to Paul? As a class, talk about how much importance should be placed on doctrine. In what ways might we be guilty of overemphasizing or underemphasizing doctrine?

4. Suppose someone were to say to you, “How do I discover what my spiritual gift is?” How would you answer them? In general, how are we able to discover what our gifts are?
LESSON 9  *November 19-25

Living the New Life

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 1:26-32; 3:10-18; 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:9-16; Eph. 4:17-32; Phil. 4:8, 9.

Memory Text: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV).

Paul’s presentation on the practical implications of Christian unity began with a call to Christians, both Jew and Gentile, that they “walk worthy of the calling with which [they] were called” (Eph. 4:1, NKJV). This walk makes several demands of us. The first is preservation of the unity of Christ’s body in the midst of diversity (vss. 1-12). The second, our study this week, deals with walking in a new way, which is crucial for maintaining the unity Paul talks about.

This new way is neither a modification nor an improvement of the old. It is a radical transformation that rejects old values and adopts a totally new lifestyle—in thought, character, values, relationships, and motives. It is passing from death to life. It is a change of owners: from Satan to Christ.

The Week at a Glance: What kind of picture of humanity does Paul depict? How is the life of a Christian to be changed after accepting Christ? How is the new life to be manifested among Christians? How is this new life related to the unity of the church as a whole? What role does the Holy Spirit play in our new life? How are we to be “imitators” (Eph. 5:1, NKJV) of God?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 26.
Put Away the Old \textit{(Eph. 4:17-22)}

A life “worthy of the calling” \textit{(Eph. 4:1, NKJV)} is not only a life of unity and growth as we saw last week but also a new life. This new life is a series of negatives and positives. The first negative is “put off . . . the old man” \textit{(vs. 22)}. The Christian life begins with a clean and clear break from the past, and Paul appeals to the Ephesians to “no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk” \textit{(vs. 17, NKJV)}. To the Romans Paul used a more serious language and called upon them to crucify the old man “that the body of sin might be done away with” \textit{(Rom. 6:6, NKJV)}.

\textbf{List} some of the characteristics of the old man as mentioned in Ephesians 4:17-24. Compare with Romans 3:10-18. What kind of picture does he depict of humanity in general? What, if anything, has changed in the more than nineteen centuries since Paul wrote?

\begin{itemize}
  \item Notice, in his depiction of the Ephesians, that Paul uses words such as “darkness,” “ignorance,” and “blindness” that led them into moral decadence. Their mind, because of sin, could not comprehend spiritual truth. As a result, their lives were wasted in seeking God either in themselves or in worthless idols or in vain philosophy. They indulged in wishful teachings and lived in spiritual darkness \textit{(Eph. 4:18; see also Rom. 1:19-21)}. Their moral sensitivity was so compromised that they could make no distinction between good and evil. The pleasures of the body, particularly immoral and deviant behavior, became their favorite pastime. They lived in “lewdness,” “uncleanness,” and “greediness” \textit{(Eph. 4:19, NKJV; see also Rom. 1:26-32)}.
  \item Such was their life—the life of the old man—before the Gentiles came to Christ. Paul, therefore, appeals to the believers: “Don’t ever go back to the old.”
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Look at verse 19.} What is Paul saying there? What does it mean to be “past feeling”? How does one become “past feeling”? In what ways have you experienced this negative principle in your own life? Why is this a danger to anyone, even a professed Christian? What is the only protection against this problem?
**Key Text:** Ephesians 4:22

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To stress that the Christian life is a new life, not merely a modification of the old.
2. To draw attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in this new life.
3. To understand that Christ is the model for the life we should be living as Christians.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Life, Old and New (Eph. 4:23-25)
- A. Life without Christ really is just a stage of death.
- B. To have new life, to become a different person, requires active participation in the death of the old person and the old life.
- C. We can have the new life only through our acceptance of Christ’s death for us.

II. Life in the Spirit (Eph. 4:30)
- A. Paul identifies the Holy Spirit as the vehicle of the new life Christ gives us.
- B. The Holy Spirit is a personal Being and can feel grief or joy because of our thoughts and behavior.
- C. Our love of God and knowledge of His love for us should motivate us to behave righteously.

III. Imitating Christ (Eph. 4:32)
- A. In our efforts to live a life pleasing to God, only Christ Himself is a suitable role model.
- B. The most important quality to imitate—the one from which all others flow—is self-sacrificing love.
- C. To imitate God is, literally, to manifest God to others.

**Summary:** All religions and philosophies seem to agree on one thing: We are not adequate as we are. We have to change. Another thing they have in common is their lack of success in bringing about this change. Christianity recognizes that we must become something or someone other than what or who we were before—in order for this change to be genuine. Christ gives us the example, the power, and the motivation to become different and better.

**COMMENTARY**

Having argued that the Christian walk should be in balance with the Christian calling, Paul proceeds further to describe the Christian’s new life as a radical transformation of the old. He expresses this radical change in terms of putting away the old and putting on the new.

I. The New Life: Put Off the Old (Eph. 4:17-23)

When Paul commands, put off the “old man” and put on the “new man,” he is not speaking of some abstract theory but a
“Put On the New” (Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 4:20-24)

Having told the believers to “put off . . . the old man” (Eph. 4:22), what counsel does Paul give? Eph. 4:22-24.

In accepting Christ, the believers “put off” the old lifestyle of the Gentiles. But putting off is not enough. Christianity is not a religion of negatives. It expects the believer to rise to a higher ground of moral and spiritual living. So Paul urges: “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind and . . . put on the new man” (Eph. 4:23, 24, NKJV).

If the life of the old man were characterized by a futile mind, the life of the new man is distinguished by a renewed mind. “Do not be con-formed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).

How are believers to be renewed in the mind? Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:9-16; Phil. 4:8, 9.

After describing the vain, dark, and sinful life of the Gentiles (Eph. 4:17-20), Paul asserts that they were taught to give up such a life when they came to Christ. By using three words—learned, heard, taught—Paul reminds the believers they already well know the effect of salvation and new birth on their lifestyle. This truth did not come to them from any human source but from Jesus Himself (Eph. 4:21). Paul’s use of the name Jesus is not accidental. He wants the believers to know that the historic Jesus—the incarnate, the crucified, the risen, and the ascended One—is Himself the Truth, Himself the Revealer of truth (John 14:6).

“Those who receive the Saviour become sons of God. . . . Their minds are changed. . . . From cherishing supreme love for self, they come to cherish supreme love for God and for Christ.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1117.

In your experience in becoming a Christian, did you find that suddenly your thoughts and heart and motives and actions became pure? If not, what practical, day-by-day things can you do that will help you reach this desired goal? At the same time, what are you doing (if anything) that can hinder this work of purification?
transformation of character and personality. The old man belonged to one owner (Satan) and the new man to another (Christ), and the two lives stand in absolute contrast. Putting off the old man involves being dead to sin. Putting on the new man is living unto righteousness. “Through the power of Christ men and women have broken the chains of sinful habit. They have renounced selfishness. The profane have become reverent, the drunken sober, the profligate pure. Souls that have borne the likeness of Satan have become transformed into the image of God. This change is in itself the miracle of miracles.” —Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 476.

This transformation involves a conscious act of putting off characteristics that are typical of the “old man”: mental vanity, intellectual pride, rationalization, and unholy speculation; a life without the benefit of God and His Word, acts of uncleanness, greed, corruption, and lust (Eph. 4:17-19, 22).

The reason for such a pathetic life is that they “have not . . . learned Christ” and “have [not] been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:20, 21, NKVJ). When heard, accepted, and obeyed, the truth that is Jesus transforms the whole inward nature.

**II. The New Life: Put on the New** *(Eph. 4:24-29)*

The apostle, having urged the people to put off the old man, now emphasizes the need to put on the new. This new self is a new creation, that “God . . . created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Observe below the contrasts between the old and the new as in Ephesians:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The old man:</th>
<th>The new man:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Futile mind</td>
<td>Renewed mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alienated from God</td>
<td>Created according to God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darkened and ignorant</td>
<td>Taught in Jesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unclean and greedy</td>
<td>Righteous and holy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrupt</td>
<td>True</td>
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<tr>
<td>Therefore, put off</td>
<td>Therefore, put on</td>
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</table>

This putting on the new demands the total renunciation of the old and the establishment of a new relationship with Christ. Consequently, the new life takes on a radically different orientation. Paul mentions four examples: (1) Falsehood in thought, speech, and actions will change and become truthfulness in all things, and the making of life totally transparent and honest, particularly because “we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). (2) The new life has no room for anger that belittles and degrades. The Bible does not deny that there are situations when anger is right and proper (anger that denounces sin and injustice and establishes righteousness, as Jesus did *[Mark 3:4, 5]*); but even in such situations, reconstruction,
Live the New Life *(Eph. 4:25-29)*

The apostle is no lofty theoretician. At one moment he can lift us to majestic heights of theology; at another he can bring us down to the realities of our neighborhood. So, he outlines four imperatives of the new life. They are so simple yet so vital to maintain good relationships.

1. **Put away lying; speak the truth** *(Eph. 4:25).* Falsehood and hypocrisy hurt relationships and destroy trust. Truth, on the other hand, builds trust and confidence, strengthens relationships, and preserves unity.

   **In** what ways has lying hurt your relationships with others?

2. **‘Be angry and do not sin’** *(vs. 26, NKJV).* As humans, we inevitably face situations that anger us, and maybe even justly so. In any case, in times of anger, three cautions need to be heeded: Do not sin; that is, do not let it lead to resentment or transgression of the law. Do not let the sun go down without correcting the situation. Do not give the devil an opportunity to use anger to destroy unity and relationship.

   **How** has the devil used anger against you and your relationships?

3. **Do not steal, but work** *(vs. 28).* Thieving takes many forms—from downright stealing to withholding what rightfully belongs to another to destroying another’s name or character. A Christian lives on a high moral plane. Honest work, unselfish life, generosity, and preserving the other are marks of the new life in Christ.

   **Using** the definition listed above, how has “thieving” impacted you or someone you know in a negative way?

4. **Guard your tongue, be edifying in speech** *(vs. 29).* Words are powerful tools. Used well, they can be a great blessing. But Paul warns against “corrupt” talk. The Greek word for “corrupt” also means “rotten.” Rottenness, vulgarity, swearing, and gossip have no place in our speech. A Christian’s speech should edify and build.

   **When was the last time you were hurt by damaging words?**
   **Also, look at your answers for the day’s questions. What do they tell you about how important living as the “new man” (vs. 24) is for the unity Paul talks about?**
not revenge, ought to be the motive. (3) The new person in Jesus will cultivate honesty and desist from dishonest means. *Stop stealing,* Paul says, without mincing words. Steal not one’s possession, steal not one’s character, steal not your employer’s time or product. Steal nothing but work hard and work honestly. Paul’s new man is one who takes honesty as a basic virtue of the new person and an underlying principle of human relations. (4) The new person will speak truthfully, and that which “may minister grace unto the hearers” (*Eph. 4:29*). His or her speech has no room for gossip and slander (*James 5:12*). “The chief requisite of language,” says Ellen White, “is that it be pure and kind and true—‘the outward expression of an inward grace.’ . . .

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 3:16; 4:17-22; Philippians 4:8, 9, 13

1. Think of the new things you have in your house. Are they new because you just purchased them or because you received them as a gift? How does being new differ from being “made new” (*Eph. 4:23, NIV*)? How has God changed your life to make it “new”? (*See also 1 Cor. 2:9-16.*) Plan to share this with a person God leads you to this week.

2. Look up the words *transform/transformed* in a dictionary. Then, using a concordance, see how Scripture uses these words. Paul directs us to “be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (*Rom. 12:2, NIV*). Read Philippians 4:8, 9, 13. What focus and power make it possible for us to live as Jesus lived?

3. When someone asked you for directions or to describe something you saw, how did you do it? In Ephesians 4:25-29, Paul describes some of the visible attributes of a changed life in Christ. List these attributes. How are they practiced in our lives? Example: What does speech sound like that is “good for . . . edification” (*Eph. 4:29, NKJV*)? What does an unchanged life sound like?

4. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul commands us to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. How is it possible to mandate these attributes? How does outward behavior differ from true inner character transformation? How do Ephesians 3:16 and Philippians 4:13 help us explain God’s power in human lives to someone who is searching to overcome destructive habits?
“Grieve Not the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:30)

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30, NKJV).

The church at Ephesus had its beginnings when the apostle laid hands on the believers to receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 19:1-7). No wonder Paul speaks so much about the Holy Spirit in Ephesians—at least twelve times.

Look up the texts below and write down what Paul says about the Spirit:

Eph. 2:18
____________________________________________________________________

Eph. 3:16
____________________________________________________________________

Eph. 5:9
____________________________________________________________________

Eph. 6:17
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Elsewhere Paul states that the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6), sonship (Rom. 8:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:10-16), fruits (Gal. 5:22), hope for the future (Gal. 5:5), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-11), sanctification (Rom. 15:16), indwelling power (Rom. 8:11), etc.

Paul clearly placed great importance on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the congregation. Hence his charge: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” The statement at once reveals that the Spirit is not simply divine power but an active Person in the Godhead, sensitive to relationships. To grieve the Holy Spirit is equivalent to grieving the Father and the Son. All we have to do is read the Bible, and we can see how much God cares about our actions and how our sin and disobedience bring pain to Him. There are moral and spiritual responsibilities on all who are brought into God’s family by the Spirit; and when we violate those responsibilities, we grieve Him. It’s hard for us to understand that God could actually be pained by what we do, but that’s what our Bible tells us, and certainly the life of Jesus shows us the intimate care God has for His creatures. Thus, if He loves us and cares for us, it’s not surprising that He could be pained by what we do.

What things might you have done in the past 24 hours that would have grieved the Holy Spirit? Were these actions inevitable? If not, why did you do them?
“We think with horror of the cannibal who feasts on the still warm and trembling flesh of his victim; but are the results of even this practice more terrible than are the agony and ruin caused by misrepresenting motive, blackening reputation, dissecting character?”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 235.

### III. The New Life: Under New Control (Eph. 4:30-32)

The new life is new not only because it differs from the old fundamentally, but it is new because, having been redeemed by Christ, it has come under the stewardship of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Agent of the new life. He is the Teacher, the Comforter, the Third Person of the Godhead through whom Christ indwells (*John 14:16-26*). So, it is important that Christians “grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (*Eph. 4:30*).

How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? Ephesians says: when we do not live like God’s children (*Eph. 1:17*); we defile our body, which

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**Witnessing**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has identified three core values critical to the overall Adventist experience: quality of life, unity, and growth. All three focus areas guide church members as they move steadily forward to complete the mission of sharing the good news with humanity. Teaching, preaching, and healing are successful, hands-on methods used to touch the lives of men, women, and children in need of salvation.

Personal participation in mission should be the ringing cry of every Adventist church member. To some, mission remains closely associated with supporting the work overseas or away from the member’s home division. Certainly, this remains a high priority with all members. However, mission work can be found all around us—where we live, where we work, where we shop, and where we play.

No matter what part of the world you call home, finding others in need of the gospel message and in need of compassionate, nurturing attention is easy. Eradicating abuse, an obstacle to full joy and trust for many women and children around the world, remains a deep commitment for church leadership. (See <http://beingadventist.org/quality-of-life.html>.) However, it is often the individual church member who can make the most immediate and positive difference in the lives of those who live in such conditions.

Each member can make a difference—in the mission field around the corner or halfway around the world. Just get started! Be an imitator of God! Live the new life!
“Be Imitators of God” (Eph. 4:31–5:1, NKJV)

Paul’s command to those who are saved and now living as one united body of Jews and Gentiles is to walk in the new life. This new life involves many details: putting off, putting on, persevering, and not grieving the Spirit. In today’s lesson, Paul presents a one-phrase summary of the new way: “Be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1, NIV).

How can we, as fallen human beings, be “imitators of God”? What does Paul mean here?

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After telling us to be imitators of God, Paul then makes the charge personal and intimate: “as dear children” (vs. 1, NKJV). When a parent and child have a close and intimate relationship, spending time with each other and sharing life activities, often the child tends to be like the parent. Thus, the more time we spend with God in prayer, meditation, and study, the more like Him we can become.

“Just as children imitate their parents, so we should imitate Christ. His great love for us led him to sacrifice himself so that we might live. Our love for others should be of the same kind—a love that goes beyond affection to self-sacrificing service.”—Life Application Bible, on Ephesians 5:1, 2.

In Ephesians 4:32 Paul gives three qualities that should mark our lives. What are they, and how is each one, in its own way, a reflection of God? As you write down your answer, ask yourself what you could do to better manifest these qualities in your own life.

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It was Christmas Eve. A child in tattered clothes was looking through the glittering windows of a store, her eyes focused on a pretty doll, but she had no way of getting it. Just then a man removed that doll. The little girl’s face fell but soon lighted up when the man came out of the store and gave the doll to her. She looked up and asked, “Are you God?” Maybe no one has ever said something quite like that to you, but in what ways have you reflected the character of God to someone recently?
is God’s dwelling place (Eph. 2:22); we disrupt the unity of the church (Eph. 5:29, 30); we return to the life of the old man (Eph. 5:8-10); and we give room for Satan by indulging in lying, resentment, thieving, and corrupt speech (Eph. 5:3, 4).

In summary, we grieve the Holy Spirit when we do not live a life “worthy of the calling” in which we “were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:1, 30, NKJV). Our life is the certificate of who owns us.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: What is it like when a child learns to walk? The title “toddler” is very descriptive, isn't it? Parents and grandparents do their best to capture these important moments on film and video. Share your memories. How does our heavenly Father view our efforts to walk “in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4)? What does He do to encourage and support us?

Thought Questions:

1. When we read Romans 1:26-31, we are often thankful we do not know anyone who would be included in Paul’s list. Mentally review your life’s journey. What differences are there between how you lived before you met Christ as a personal Savior and now? How have you allowed God to change you during the past year?

2. When seamstresses sew and carpenters build, they use patterns and blueprints. What would happen if they used the wrong patterns and blueprints or just threw them away and continued on their own? Paul invites us to consider different directions for our lives. “Do not conform . . . to . . . this world, but be transformed” (Rom. 12:2, NIV). Why is such a radical redirection a benefit? How would you share this with a neighbor or friend who is struggling with trusting God as Lord of his or her life?

Application Question:

“‘There is no one righteous, not even one; . . . no one . . . understands, no one who seeks God’ (Rom. 3:10, 11, NIV), Paul says, quoting the prophets. Doesn’t this sound like the adversary’s accusations against us? Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; Ephesians 4:17-32; Philippians 4:8, 9 as a group. Then share a season of prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit to live in your lives. Plan, as a group, to perform an act of service this week that lives out God’s activity in your lives.
Further Study: *Christ’s transforming work.* “Jesus Himself, in His infinite mercy, is working on human hearts, effecting spiritual transformations so amazing that angels look on with astonishment and joy. The same unselfish love that characterizes the Master is seen in the character and life of His true followers. Christ expects that men will become partakers of His divine nature while in this world, thus not only reflecting His glory to the praise of God, but illuminating the darkness of the world with the radiance of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 5, p. 731.

Unrenewed members. “The accession of members who have not been renewed in heart and reformed in life is a source of weakness to the church. This fact is often ignored. Some ministers and churches are so desirous of securing an increase of numbers that they do not bear faithful testimony against unchristian habits and practices.”—Page 172.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. There are those who believe that the Christian concept of basic human sinfulness is wrong, even damaging. How would you respond to someone who holds such views?

2. Have someone in class read aloud the second Ellen G. White quote listed above and open a discussion on what she is saying. How do we strike the right balance here; that is, having a church in which sinners are welcomed and brought to the Cross while, at the same time, upholding the high standards of conduct the Christian life requires?

3. In class, ask those who are willing to talk about someone who truly was an “imitator of God.” Who was that person, what did he or she do, and what impact did that person have on your life?

4. Go around the class and have each person answer this question: “Name one great change Christ has brought into your life.” Discuss the various answers.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exodus 20; Isa. 5:20; John 15:10; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 5:1-21; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6.

Memory Text: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8, NIV).

Paul continues his exhortations on a life that will be “worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1, NIV) by telling us to undertake the Christian walk in all seriousness (Eph. 5:1-21). One doesn’t have to read very far in Paul before one can see just how seriously Paul takes the Christian walk. Paul knows nothing about cheap grace. Though we are saved by what Christ has done for us, we must live in response to the salvation we have been given in Jesus. We have a new life; we now have to live that new life as God commands.

In the texts for this week, Paul provides five contextual reasons for such a walk: love, judgment, light, wisdom, and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Though devoting only a few words to each, Paul, nevertheless, clearly sets out what is expected of those who once walked in darkness but now are in the light.

The Week at a Glance: What does walking in love mean? How stern a warning did Paul give regarding the judgment upon unrepentant sinners? What does it mean to walk in light as opposed in darkness? What is the difference between walking wisely and walking foolishly?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 3.*
Walk in Love

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:1, 2, NKJV).

Believers are called to be imitators of God. God in Christ is our model in everything—in ethics, in suffering, in obedience, in work, in prayer, and, above all, in love. So, we are admonished to “walk in love.”

At least three principles emerge from the words of this text.

First, Christ’s love is selfless. It is agape love: a love that is based on principle, not on emotion; an outgoing love that centers on meeting the needs of others even though they are undeserving of it. God’s love is such that He demonstrated “His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NKJV). To walk in love is to love the unlovable.

Think about someone unlovable. What tangible things can you do to start showing this person love? Why not commit now to doing it?

Second, Christ’s love is sacrificial. Christ is the supreme example of sacrifice. He bore the cross of shame and gave up His life in order that humanity might be redeemed (2 Cor. 5:21). To walk in love is to abandon self in order to minister to others. “Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 101.

When was the last time you actually suffered in behalf of someone else? What does your answer tell you about yourself and the changes you need to make?

Third, Christ’s love is reconciling. Christ reconciled all broken relationships and brought complete unity (Rom. 5:10, 2 Cor. 5:18). To walk in Christ’s love is to be ministers of His reconciliation.

In what ways have you seen the power of love bring reconciliation? Think of an example you can share with the class.
**Key Text:** Ephesians 5:2-5

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To discuss the nature of the love seen in a true Christian life.
2. To stress the seriousness of sin as an impediment to a life with God.
3. To understand the elements of the Christian life.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Walking in Love (Eph. 5:2)
   A. Christian love is modeled on the love shown by Christ on the cross and is thus sacrificial and selfless.
   B. Christian love is not an emotion so much as it is a principle.
   C. Christian love works toward reconciliation, just as Christ reconciled God and humankind.

II. Things That Weigh Us Down (Eph. 5:5)
   A. As Christians, we choose to walk with God.
   B. We should view our own participation in sin and evil in the light of God’s future judgment upon them.
   C. We are not free to regard any sin as minor.

III. Walking in the Light (Eph. 5:13-15)
   A. To live a Christian life, we must actively seek God’s help.
   B. God provides us with wisdom to discern His will, if we look for it.
   C. The Holy Spirit will help us to see God’s will and give us the power to do it.

**Summary:** We are told elsewhere in the Bible that God is love. Therefore, it follows logically that if we are to follow God, we should live lives in which love is the first principle. As humans, our concept of love may be misguided or mistaken. In Ephesians, Paul attempts to show us what love in the divine sense is like.

**Commentary**

In Ephesians 5:1-21, Paul calls upon us to take the Christian walk seriously in the context of (1) God’s revelation of love and judgment, (2) God’s provision of light and wisdom, and (3) God’s gift of the fullness through the Holy Spirit.

I. Walk: In View of God’s Revelation (Eph. 5:1-7)

The passage begins strikingly: “Therefore be followers of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1, NKJV). “Be imitators of God,” says the New International Version. Be imitators is not just an ethical appeal. There are many who do not know God but live an impeccably ethical life. The essential difference between Christianity and mere ethics is that Christians are called to imitate God as children who have experienced God’s love and forgiveness through Christ (Eph.
Walk in View of Judgment *(Eph. 5:3-7)*

**Read** Ephesians 5:3-7 and then answer the following questions:

- What are the specific sins Paul warns about?
- In what ways are all these sins violations of the Ten Commandments *(see Exodus 20)*?
- Notice how Paul contrasts these sins with his admonition to “walk in love” *(Eph. 5:2)*. Why are these sins the opposite of walking in love? *See also* Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4; John 15:10; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6.
- Look at the warning Paul gives in Ephesians 5:6. Given the context, what do you think those “vain words” were about? *See also* 1 John 3:7.

One of the great tragedies of life is to live as though God does not exist or that it doesn’t matter if He does or not. Such an attitude fosters a life that is restricted to the present with no thought for the future. But the biblical view of life projects that history is moving toward an ultimate point when all humankind shall be held accountable before God’s judgment *(2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 9:27)*. Final accountability to God is inescapable, and Paul warns that as surely as the love of God appeared for the salvation of humanity, so surely “the wrath of God” will appear “upon the sons of disobedience” *(Eph. 5:6, NKJV)*. The divine wrath is divine judgment against evil and its children. Because of this certainty of judgment, Paul appealed to the believers, “Do not be partakers with them” *(vs. 7, NKJV)*. With whom? Verse 6 speaks of those “with empty words.” These were false teachers still clinging to their pagan philosophy, denying the reality of sin and a final judgment for that sin. No wonder Paul warns them to stay away from such people and their philosophy, for they go counter to the truth as it is in Jesus. Paul expresses horror at these false teachings and calls those responsible as “sons of disobedience” upon whom will fall “the wrath of God” *(vs. 6, NKJV)*. As far as Christians are concerned, the apostle pleads that among them there should not be even a hint, a thought, or a joke concerning such sins.

If you look at the kind of sins that will bring judgment, Paul said nothing about adultery or murder, the more “serious” sins. Instead, he talks about such things as jesting and covetousness. What should this tell us about the nature of even these sins?
4:32). Because God loves us, we must show His love in ethics, in forgiveness, in work, in prayer, and, above all, in loving others.

So, Paul wants God’s children to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2) and to walk in the certainty of judgment to come. To walk in love is to walk as Jesus did, for He is the supreme Example of love that Divinity has ever revealed and humanity has ever seen. Christ’s love involves loving the unlovable (Rom. 5:8), loving while expecting nothing in return, loving to the point of death. So should our love be. The motivation for such love is not self-glory but clinging to Jesus, not ethics but evangelism, not achievement of discipline but adherence to discipleship.

Those who walk in love will let that walk be rooted, not only in God’s love (Eph. 4:32, 5:1) but also in view of His wrath, His judgment that is reserved for “the children of disobedience” (Eph. 5:6). When you compare the children who imitate God and the children who await God’s wrath, the distinction becomes clear: The former walk the walk of love that leads to fruits of obedience to God; the latter walk as children of disobedience who live as though sin is not real and God does not matter (vss. 3-7). “Neither artist nor ascetic scientist nor super-moral Pharisee,” says one commentator, “is, in the Bible, excused from the humbling appearance before God as a sinner. Our Epistle allows of no deception in moral matters. There is no evasion. It is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”—The Interpreter’s Bible (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1981), vol. 10, p. 708.

II. Walk: In Light and Wisdom (Eph. 5:8-17)

Christians are God’s children (Eph. 5:1), and as such they are also “children of light” (vs. 8). The former status demands that they “walk in love” (vs. 2), and the latter expects that they walk in light. What does it mean to walk in the light? First and obviously, it is not to walk in darkness (vss. 3-12). Walking in light means to bear fruits of “goodness, righteousness and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord” (vss. 9, 10, NIV). Walking in the light and finding out what pleases God are natural constituents of the new life of the Spirit.

Second, children of light will “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11, NKJV). Light may be the absence of darkness, and darkness may be the absence of light, as one Indian adage says, but light and darkness cannot coexist. As children of light, Christians must live so that they expose the evils of darkness. Christians must be known in voice and action for their stand against evil’s every manifestation. “Such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 57.
Walk in Light (Eph. 5:8-14)

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8, NKJV).

Having defined the Christian life as walking in love, with a view of the impending judgment, Paul now turns to a third aspect: walking as children of light. In keeping with his style, he provides another contrast: Once you were children of darkness, now you are children of light (Eph. 5:8).

While darkness represents the old life, light stands for the new. The apostle recognizes that believers have moved from darkness to light (vs. 8). Since conversion they have become light in the Lord; that is, reflectors of the character of the One who said “ ‘I am the light of the world’ ” (John 8:12).

Oftentimes we tend to equate “light” with intellectual knowledge, knowledge of facts, and “darkness” as ignorance of facts. And though there’s some truth to this idea, read over Ephesians 5:8-14 and answer this question: What does Paul equate walking in the light with? More specifically, is it dealing only with head knowledge or with the moral life and the conduct of a Christian? Why is this answer important?

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Notice, too, Paul is so firm about living a life free from moral taint that he not only admonishes us to stay away from those who do evil but he also calls upon us to reprove them.

Read carefully Ephesians 5:13. How does that help us understand how we might reprove evil without having to open our mouths? See John 3:20.

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Have you ever known anyone whose lifestyle, demeanor, and character acted as light that reproved your darkness? How did you respond? Did you accept the silent reproof with humility and repentance, or did you flee the light or even fight against it by, perhaps, calling it darkness? See Isa. 5:20.
Paul adds one more thought about children of light. They “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15).

Walking in wisdom is (1) walking with care and watchfulness, respecting and serving God, and turning from evil (Prov. 9:13, 8:10); (2) living with a consciousness of the nearness of the end time (Eph. 5:16); and (3) always living within the context of God’s will and wishes (vs. 17).

III. Walk: In the Spirit (Eph. 5:18-20)

Thus far in chapter 5, Paul spoke of three elements of the Christian walk: love, light, and wisdom. Now he adds a fourth and perhaps the most operative element: “Be filled with the Spirit” (vs. 18). The Christian life is wholesome and complete when that life is under the endowment and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Inductive Bible Study


1 Compare and contrast selfless love with selfish love. Do the same with sacrificial love and reconciling love versus self-seeking and self-serving love. What makes it possible for humans to act and serve as Christ did? How does Christ’s ministry as recorded in Romans 5:10 motivate us to care for others?

2 “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2, NKJV). How does focusing on Heaven change our lives and actions? Review Paul’s list of prohibited behaviors that bring judgment (Eph. 5:3-7). Why is there such a sharp contrast between heavenly things and earthly things? How has God helped you to “walk as children of light” (vs. 8)?

3 Conversion marks a turning point in our lives. Recall your own acceptance of Christ’s salvation. How did it change your perceptions of light and darkness? What things did you discover in your life that reflected sin’s reordering of priorities and understanding? (See Isa. 5:20.) In a season of prayer with God, invite Him to show you other areas that need changing in your life. Invite Him to walk with you to make those changes possible.

4 “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18, NIV). Why does Paul state this as an absolute? How does this filling impact us? How does it prevent evil? (See vss. 19, 20.) How are singing to God and giving thanks to Him positive benefits to our lives? How does praise to God impact our witness to others?
Walk in Wisdom (Eph. 5:15-17)

Our Christian walk, Paul has told us, must be different from that of the world. We ought to walk according to love. We must be mindful of the judgment to come in all we do. We should take care that we walk in light. Now Paul adds another dimension: walk with wisdom.

The Bible talks a lot about wisdom. In the following verses, what kind of wisdom is being talked about? 1 Cor. 1:20, 21; 3:19; 2 Cor. 1:12. What are examples of this kind of wisdom?

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In contrast to this kind of wisdom, Paul, in these verses, talks about a different kind of wisdom, a different kind of knowledge. As seen earlier, this kind of knowledge isn’t mere head knowledge, a knowledge of facts, however useful and helpful and “good” those facts could be. Instead, the whole context here places knowledge in the context of what we do. The wise do correctly, the ignorant do foolishly, regardless of how much intellectual knowledge either one has.

How does Paul in Ephesians 5:17 describe what it means to be “unwise”? How do these following verses help answer that question? Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, Isa. 33:6.

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The world exists only because of God; everything that exists does so only through the will of God. It’s no wonder, then, that knowledge would consist in knowing the will of God, at least as much as we are able. Though there is much about God and His will we cannot know, we can know that His will for us is that we live pure, holy lives, lives that reflect His love and His character. This is true wisdom. Thus, some of the “smartest” people in the world live in the grossest ignorance and darkness.

Ephesians 5:15 tells us to walk “carefully” (RSV) so we are not “fools” (vs. 17, NEB) but wise. What practical things can we do that will help us not to be “fools”?
Interestingly, Paul places the phrase “Be filled with the Spirit” in antithesis to “Be not drunk with wine” (vs. 18). The point is not between the Spirit and the wine but one of self-control in the Christian life. Under whose control are we—the Holy Spirit or something else? Drunkenness or other-induced frenzies take away self-control; affect rational and moral capacity; and lead to spiritual, moral, and social deviation. A Christian has no part in such a life. But being filled with the Spirit leads to a life of joy, thanksgiving, praise, and useful service.

In Greek, “Be filled” underscores three particulars. First, it is in the imperative mood: The command is not optional but essential. Second, it uses a plural form: The Spirit is not the privilege of an elite few but of the entire faith community. Third, it is in the present tense: Filled with the Spirit is not a terminus but a continuous experience.

Witnessing

Have you ever known someone who went through Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to beat their addiction to alcohol? If you have, you know that the individual always refers to himself or herself as an alcoholic; not a recovering alcoholic but an alcoholic. This is because many believe alcoholism is an illness that cannot be cured, although remission is possible. Alcoholics also tell you that they never let their guard down, not for one moment of the day or night, because vigilance is the key to remaining sober.

Sinners can say the same thing. Once a sinner, always a sinner. True. But unlike AA, there is a complete recovery program available to those who will exercise faith and claim it. For sinners, Jesus Christ and the recovery plan of salvation is the much-needed release from the grip of sin. Like alcoholics, Christians see each new day full of fresh possibilities and opportunities. Vigilance is the key to remaining on the path toward heaven. Without extreme alertness on the Christian’s part, it becomes easy for Satan to distract and nudge in such subtle ways that those traveling the heaven-bound highway take the exit to Satan’s alternate road—a road that exacts a much higher toll from its travelers.

When Jesus’ followers admit they are powerless over sin, when they humbly invite Him into their hearts, a complete transformation occurs, because He completely saturates them with His grace. This is not simply a remission.

Now is the perfect time for recovering sinners to share with all they come in contact with how they, too, may ask God for complete abstinence from sin and begin the walk of a lifetime.
Walk With the Fullness of the Spirit
(Eph. 5:18-20)

To the four elements of the Christian walk, Paul adds the final and, perhaps, the most operative element: “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Believers filled with the Holy Spirit will have His empowerment to walk the Christian way in love, in light, in wisdom, and in the sense of the coming judgment. Enlightenment and empowerment are two of the great blessings that come from the indwelling Spirit.

Read Ephesians 5:18. Why do you think Paul used the example of alcohol there? What point is he making? See also Rom. 6:16.

Though Paul is using alcohol in his example, he could really be talking about anything that comes between the believer and the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we should let nothing control us over and beyond the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul is making a profound theological statement that is fundamental to the experience of the new birth and sanctification that come as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The question every Christian needs to ask is, “Under whose control is my body, mind, and spirit functioning? Is it under the control of alcohol or greed or lust or covetousness or anything else that can hinder my walk with God? Or is it under the control of the Holy Spirit?” The Spirit is what guides in the path we should go; if anything else controls us, we will surely be led astray.

If we are to be “filled” with the Spirit, how much room exists for anything else?

After telling them to be “filled with the Spirit,” what does Paul then tell them to do? See Eph. 5:19-21. How are all these things related?

If someone were to ask you, “Have you received the Holy Spirit?” what would your answer be? What would you present as evidence of your having received the fullness of the Spirit?
One more thought: Alcohol has the power to enslave, to depress, to demolish one’s self-dignity and to cause us to relate poorly with others. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit has power to help us live in fellowship, worship, gratitude, and submission (Eph. 5:19-21). That’s reason enough to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When we teach our pets to do tricks, we offer them treats to encourage repetition of the desired behavior. Share stories about the pets you have now or had when you were growing up. How did you feel about them? God rescued the nation of Israel (and us) from captivity. What a treat! Then He asked them to live according to His character as described in the Ten Commandments. “‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out . . . of slavery’” (Exod. 20:2, NIV). Share a testimony of God’s salvation enacted in your life.

Thought Questions:
1. “Be imitators of God . . . as dearly loved children” (Eph. 5:1, NIV). What was the first thing your child did to imitate you? Did he or she copy the words you used or pick up your briefcase to head out for work? These are poignant times. What is the difference between our children’s attempts, and our own, when we try to imitate our Savior? Why is it so necessary to focus on Jesus instead of looking back at our lives before we met Him? See Eph. 5:8, 9.

2. Look up the word obey in a dictionary. Then review at least five texts in the Bible that use it. See John 15:10; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6. What is the context of the word obey in these texts? Why is obedience such a difficult concept? How does a personal relationship with God change obedience from a duty to a privilege? Based on such a relationship, how would you describe the Ten Commandments to someone?

Application Question:
“His command is that you walk in love” (2 John 1:6, NIV). For the next four days, keep track of the first thing you do every morning. How did it include walking with Jesus? If you found that your only real contact with Him during the day was a hurried prayer before you drifted off to sleep, ask Him to help you change your priorities. Then keep a journal of how your life is impacted by inviting Him to walk with you from your first waking thought each day. Share your experience with someone who is facing the same challenge.
Further Study: *Walking in love.* “All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another.

“This love is the evidence of their discipleship. ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,’ said Jesus, ‘if ye have love one to another.’ When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages,* p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

1. Based on Sunday’s lesson, share, as a class, examples of the power of love bringing reconciliation between either groups or individuals who were previously in contention. What lessons can we learn from these examples for ourselves?

2. “Let no one deceive you with empty words”—that is, false teachings (*Eph. 5:6, NKJV*). What are some of the false teachings currently disturbing the Christian faith, and how would you handle them?

3. Discuss the question of what “holiness” is. Is it more than a mere adherence to the law? Can you be a strict follower of the law and still not be holy?

4. As a class, take time together to do what Paul tells believers in Ephesians 5:19, 20 to do. Sing some songs and have people give testimonies of thankfulness to God. When done, ask “What benefits do we get, as believers, by praising God and openly giving thanks? Why should we make a habit of doing this?”

5. Discuss the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom (see Wednesday’s lesson). Are they necessarily in contradiction with each other? Can worldly wisdom ever help us better understand godly wisdom? If so, in what way?
Christian Relationships

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Exod. 20:12; Judges 1:21; Luke 9:23; John 3:13; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-9; 1 John 4:10, 11.

Memory Text: “Submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21, NKJV).

Ephesians 1–3 gave us the basic theology of the church. From chapter 4 on, Paul discusses the practical application of this theology and how it applies to the Christian life, which, among other things, preserves unity amid diversity, emphasizes the Christian walk, and (as we’ll study now) builds adequate relationships.

In the final analysis, Christianity is a religion of relationships, relationships with God and with each other. It makes no sense to claim to have a vital relationship with God without that relationship impacting how we relate to family and community. Church, home, and work are the primary arenas of Christian living. One cannot be a saint in the church and a devil at home. Christianity is not holiness in a vacuum. It is holiness in wholeness; that is, it affects every dimension of living—spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social. This week’s lesson turns to principles of Christian relationships.

The Week at a Glance: What is Christian submission?
How are those in authority supposed to act toward those under their authority? How are husbands and wives to relate to each other? What does Paul write about parent/child relationships?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.*
Submit to One Another (Eph. 5:21)

Read Ephesians 5:21. What is Paul saying here to us?

The verse is connected to the clause in Ephesians 5:18: “Be filled with the Spirit” (NKJV). Christian submission must not be equated with servility but rather with a proper attitude of humility and consideration to each other. Admittedly, such an attitude is not part of the natural self but a result of being “filled” with the Spirit, as was the case with fellowship and worship, singing and praising, and continual thanksgiving (Eph. 5:19, 20).

Viewed thus, submission does not carry the meaning we normally attribute to it. The biblical view of submission in no way teaches a dictatorial, authoritarian, unjust stance in social relationships where one exercises power and the other crawls in helplessness.

Indeed, Paul adds a qualifying clause to his counsel on submission: “in the fear of God” or “out of reverence for Christ” (NIV). The Christians’ conduct and relationship with each other—be it between husband and wife, parent and child, master and slave—does involve submission but in the context of reverence for Christ. God is not a wrecker but a builder. He is not dictatorial and selfish but loving. Reverence for Christ draws a line beyond which the call for submission does not extend. Where submission is a violation of one’s conscience or contradictory to God’s will, Peter’s bold stance, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), must take over. What should a wife or daughter do when the man of the house insists she go into prostitution in order to meet his economic demands? What should a child do if the father commands him to be a street-corner vendor for drugs? Submit? Never. Submission in human relationships is never absolute and unquestioned. As its border, it has the will of God. When a so-called Christian expects submission beyond that border, that person has no right to be called a Christian and deserves to be dismissed from any Christian privilege. Submission “in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21) demands respect on the part of wife and dignity and honor on the part of husband. This is even more crucial in an age such as ours, during which spousal and child abuse abound. No child of God should become or should be treated as a doormat.

It’s one thing to submit when we shouldn’t submit, but what about submitting when we really need to? Sometimes that’s even harder. Why is the foot of the Cross the only place where we can learn the meaning of Christian submission? What role does death to self play in submission? See Luke 9:23.
Key Text: Ephesians 5:21-24

Teachers Aims:
1. To stress that Christianity is based upon relationships.
2. To understand that human relationships are to mirror our relationships with, and our submission to, Christ.
3. To discuss how Christianity should result in stronger and more harmonious relationships.

Lesson Outline:

I. Submission and Responsibility (Eph. 5:21)
   A. Submission, in a Christian sense, is not identical to mindless servility.
   B. Even in human relationships where submission is proper, one’s conscience and God’s will come first.
   C. The role of the individual to whom one may submit as a Christian is one of responsibility, not of absolute power.

II. Submitting to Christ (Eph. 5:23, 24)
   A. Christ is in authority over all of us.
   B. Those in authority must be aware that that authority is lent to them by Christ and is to be used unselfishly and wisely.
   C. Authority and submission are meaningless if Christ’s love is absent.

III. Living in Harmony (Eph. 5:33)
   A. Christianity supports the traditions and customs of any given society to the extent that they are just.
   B. In honoring spouses and parents, we are honoring God.
   C. Paul recommends that those who find themselves in unfair situations overcome injustice with love.

Summary: Since Christ is the central figure of Christianity, we are to model our approach to life on His. This includes our response to those in authority over us and our use of any authority that we may have over others. Christ, although He had rightful authority over all, became servant of all. Most power conflicts and abuses of authority that we see in the world arise from failure to follow this example.

Commentary

Christianity is not a philosophy. It is the good news of redeemed relationships. The gospel shows its power not in the arena of Athens or in the chambers of the Roman senate but in the church of Antioch, on the streets of Ephesus, and in the workplaces of Laodicea. Paul knows that a theology of redemption—wondrous as it is—can have relevance only if it creates a world of new relationships.

Our study (Eph. 5:21-33, 6:1-9) is about relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, masters and slaves. Each
Authority (Eph. 5:22; 6:1, 5)

The question of submission and obedience on the part of a wife, a child, or a slave raises the issue of authority. Upon what authority does a husband, a father, and a master expect submission and obedience? Ephesians 5:21 says submission is to be “in the fear of God” or “out of reverence for Christ” (NIV). Similar phrases occur in other places: “as to the Lord” (vs. 22, NKJV), “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1), “as to Christ” (vs. 5, NKJV). These repeated references to Christ seem to indicate a divine order to this authority structure. Even though Paul does not elaborate on this point, he provides a useful analogy in the relationship between Christ and the church. “Christ is head of the church,” and, therefore, “the church is subject to Christ” (Eph. 5:23, 24, NKJV). The headship of Christ is the model to which the church subjects itself. Likewise, the headship of the husband, father, and master is to follow the model established by Christianity. Authority is not tyranny nor is it without limits. In fact, Paul argues that both authority and submission are as in Christ, who “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (vs. 25). This point cannot be overemphasized. Love, not power, is the motivation behind the authority given to preserve the order of an organizational unit such as home or household. Similarly, love, not fear or a feeling of inferiority, is the motivation for submission.

What do these verses say about Christian human relationships?

**Gen. 1:26, 27**

**Acts 17:26**

**Gal. 3:28**

**Eph. 3:6**

Before the Lord we are all the same: sinners in need of divine grace. Though the concepts of authority and submission have been perverted, that doesn’t mean they aren’t biblical. Those in positions of authority must always remember who they are in relationship to God and to others who might be under that authority. To pervert this role is, surely, a grievous sin before the Lord, who knows even if a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29-31).

If some people need to learn submission at the foot of the Cross, what can those in authority learn at the Cross that could help them use their authority in a God-given manner?
of these relationships is qualified by the phrase “in Christ” or “as in the Lord.” Authentic relationship is possible only in Christ. But first, a clarification on submission and authority.

I. Relationships: Submission and Authority
(Eph. 5:21)
Paul begins with a general statement: “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21). One may question whether Paul meant this for our generation when forces everywhere are clamoring for less authority and more freedom. No philosophy or ideology is better qualified to speak of human equality and dignity than Christianity. Paul has established that point already in Ephesians 2, and he repeats that in God “there is no favoritism with him” (6:9, NIV). The apostle is a democrat of the first order. When he speaks of submission, therefore, he is not speaking of servility but an attitude of humility and consideration. Relationship in a redeemed community should be one of respect for one another. But even for this, the apostle places a defining parameter: “in the fear of God”; that is, “out of reverence for Christ” (5:21, NIV). The mind of the Incarnate One is one of submission and humility (Phil. 2:5-8) that God’s plans may be fulfilled. It is in this context that Paul pleads for self-abnegation out of reverence for Christ.

II. Relationships: Between Spouses
(Eph. 5:22, 33)
This long passage (vss. 22-33) is a Christian testament on the sacredness of marriage, which we need to affirm ever more strongly at a time when marriage is under attack. The divorce rate is ever-increasing, and the role of the home in society gets increasingly neglected. The apostle urges the believers to give heed to two significant points:

First, God created marriage (Gen. 2:21, 22; Eph. 5:31). He ordained the male and the female to become one flesh. Out of this ordination, marriage receives its sanctity. When the two became one, neither could claim supremacy over the other nor have the right to abuse or suppress the other. The fact that marriage is, unfortunately, a victim of such deviations is to be located not in the institution of marriage but in the root cause of all our problems; namely, sin. So, to deal with deviations such as claims of supremacy or subjugation in marital relationships, we must direct our attention to the problem of sin and not attack the sanctity of marriage.

Second, in marriage the husband is described as the head, even as Christ is Head of the church. As Head, what did Christ do to the church? Was He a manipulator or dictator, abusing the church or violating her will? Christ’s headship is defined in what He did: He loved the church, sacrificed Himself (Eph. 5:25), and did all that is necessary to make it glorious and holy (vs. 27). Christ cherishes and
Husbands and Wives (Eph. 5:22-25)

As we read the verses for today, we can see that marriage is a divine institution, with husband and wife being equal partners (Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:31). The unity and equality of the partners is stressed in the divine utterance that the two “shall become one flesh” (vs. 31, NKJV). Compare this with Ephesians 2:14, which speaks of how Christ made one out of two (Jew and Gentile), and you will realize the marvel of the divine origin of both marriage and church.

Also, Christ and the church are closely linked. Christ is the Head, and the church is the body (5:23). Without stretching the metaphor to dangerous proportions, it must be noted: (a) As body, the church is subordinate to Christ, the Head; (b) as Head, Christ loves His body the church, died for it, saved it, and sanctified it.

Submission and love do not antagonize the partners in marriage but bring them together. After all, submission means to give oneself up completely to the other. Love means the same thing and includes loving to the extent of dying for the other, even as Christ did.

How does the metaphor of Christ’s relationship to the church help us understand how the husband is to relate to the wife? What force must be the prime motivator? See Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10, 11; Jude 21.

This intimate relationship between Christ and the church should be reflected between husband and wife. And though Paul and Peter are clear that wives are to “submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22, NKJV; see also Col. 3:18, 1 Pet. 3:1), he balances that by telling the husbands they must love their wives (see Eph. 5:25, 28; Col. 3:19). This love is to be modeled after Christ’s love (Eph. 5:25)—unreserved and sacrificial. The husband’s headship spells not tyranny but responsibility in a partnership, while submission means not servility but honor, fidelity, and respect. Of course, we need to recognize human frailties: There are husbands who treat their wives as servants and abuse them endlessly. But that is a cultural and sin problem that Paul is not addressing here.

What are some of the forces in your own society and culture that are warring against marriage? How is what Paul wrote here a powerful means to protect marriage against those forces?
nourishes the church (vs. 29). Because Christ did all this, the church’s response is love and respect for Christ. The church is like a bride with her bridegroom (Christ).

Transfer this idea to the husband and wife relationship. Paul is commanding the husband to do what Christ did and the wife to respond as the church did. There is no question of the husband asserting superiority or the wife being subjected to servility and abuse. The husband-wife relationship is marked by giving and responding in total love, just as the Christ-church relationship reveals the same. Between husband and wife, headship does not mean tyranny but responsibility; subjection does not mean servility but fidelity and respect; obedience does not mean slavishly yielding to irrational demands but harmony of will and purpose within the sanctity and security of marriage.

III. Relationships: Between Parents and Children (Eph. 6:1-4)

Christian education must begin in a Christian home, and the first lesson children ought to learn must be obedience and honor to parents in the Lord. The first responsibility that parents ought to have is to be a consistent model, not provoking their children to anger through a life of hypocrisy and inconsistency. “One well-ordered,
Children and Parents (Exod. 20:12, Eph. 6:1-4)

No other religion or philosophy has done as much for children as Christianity. William Wilberforce, a devout Christian, ended child labor in England. William Carey, the pioneer of Christian missions, acted to end child marriage and widow burning in India. Today in some rural areas in southern India, female infants are choked or poisoned to death, and Christian hospitals and pastors have set up cradles outside their doors so that unwanted female infants could be placed there without anyone noticing.

Roman culture during the time of the apostle Paul was even worse. Barclay quotes the famous Seneca: “We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown.”—The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, p. 176.

At a time like that, Paul writes to Christian parents and their children in a famous Roman city. How delighted the children must have been to be acknowledged in the letter from the great apostle.

What two things are expected of children? At the same time, how does Paul qualify his words regarding children and their parents? How does that qualification parallel what Paul says to wives regarding how they should relate to their husbands? What differences are there, as well? Eph. 6:1-4; see also Eph. 5:22, Col. 3:18.

Paul offers two reasons for obedience. First, it is right; it is the natural, accepted norm in every society. Second, God’s moral law demands it.

Christian artists have depicted the law on two tablets: one containing the first four commandments and the other the last six—dividing our duty to God and to humans. But Jews had five on each table, as if to signify that honor to parents belongs with honor to God.

While obedience is expected of children when they are dependent on parents, honor toward them is a lifelong duty.

Paul counsels parents not to “provoke your children to wrath” (Eph. 6:4, NKJV). Think of some things that may do just that: poor example, hypocrisy, inconsistency, harshness. What else?

What forces in your society work against strong and loving parental/child relationships? What does Christianity offer that can protect those relationships?
well-disciplined family is a greater power in demonstrating the efficiency of Christianity than all the sermons in the world.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1118.

**IV. Relationships: Slaves and Masters** (*Eph. 6:5-9*)

Paul’s counsel to slaves to obey their masters is misinterpreted by some as tolerance toward slavery; however, it is far from that. The same apostle writes to Philemon to accept his escaped slave, Onesimus, “no longer as a slave . . . but . . . as a beloved brother” (*Philem. 16, NKJV*). Paul’s attitude toward slavery is simple: He does not approve it but counsels the slaves that they are indeed free where freedom counts—in the Lord—and so just keep doing their routine work *as to the Lord*. Paul’s advice to the masters is to be

### Witnessing

Practicing the five foundational graces is not always as easy as it should be, even for the most committed Christian. Situations that bring us to our knees time and time again, because they call for us to exercise humility, gentleness, longsuffering (patience), forbearance, and love, teach us just how dependent we are on the Lord for the development of those graces.

It is not easy to practice *humility* when someone deliberately goes out of his or her way to tear you down and undermine you.

It is not easy to practice *gentleness* when people taunt, goad, and take advantage of you because they believe your mild-manneredness is simply a display of weakness on your part.

It is not easy to practice *longsuffering* when the poor behavior of others drives you to the brink of your endurance time and time (and time!) again.

It is not easy to practice *forbearance* when the other individual is unwilling to work with you; when she or he will not meet you partway, halfway, or any way!

Most of all, it is not easy to *love unconditionally* at all times, especially when the above human behaviors are swirling around you.

Jesus did not promise that the Christian life would always be easy. He did promise, however, that He would supply us with the strength to follow His example and walk in His footsteps. So, although it may seem nearly impossible during difficult times, our ability to apply the five graces at all times, in all circumstances, will grow and mature as our walk with Him grows and matures.

Pray every day that God will give you an overflowing abundance of grace under fire.
Slaves and Masters *(Eph. 6:5-9)*

The Roman Empire had millions of slaves during Paul’s day. The entire economic and social structure depended on slave labor. Slaves, for the most part, were treated as no better than working animals. Even a great man like Aristotle taught that slaves were only work tools. Ownership of one human being by another without any regard or respect to that individual’s God-given rights and dignity must have been revolting to a sensitive and deeply spiritual leader like Paul.

Paul counsels the slaves in Ephesus to obey their masters and do their work as if they are doing it for Christ *(Eph. 6:5)*. Work done in sincerity and goodwill “as to the Lord, and not to men” will not go unrewarded *(vss. 7, 8, NKJV)*. Paul recognizes that slaves cannot change their circumstances, but they can conquer them. There we have a good Christian philosophy: While we cannot destroy evil at the moment, we must not let evil destroy us.

**Though** there’s no direct condemnation of the practice of slavery in the Bible, how do the following texts in their own way speak out against the principles behind the practice? *Matt. 22:39, Mark 10:44, Luke 6:31, Rom. 12:10, Phil. 2:3, 1 John 4:11.*

Paul’s counsel to the masters is also quite pointed. He reminds them that they, too, have a Master in heaven, from whom they have received grace and forgiveness of sins. Hence his appeal for the slave owners to be gentle, not threatening, toward their servants *(Eph. 6:9)*.

Why didn’t Paul do anything more? “It was not the apostle’s work to overturn arbitrarily or suddenly the established order of society. To attempt this would be to prevent the success of the gospel. But he taught principles which struck at the very foundation of slavery and which, if carried into effect, would surely undermine the whole system.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 459, 460.

Paul’s ministry did bear fruit, and many slave owners became ardent Christians, along with their slaves.

Philemon is a good example. Paul, sending back this escaped slave, Onesimus, writes to Philemon to accept him “no longer as a slave but . . . as a beloved brother” *(Philem. 16, NKJV)*.

**What principles** can you take from Paul’s words that can help you better understand how you should act (depending upon your situation) toward either your boss or those who work under you or both?
gentle and kind toward their servants (Eph. 6:9), keeping in mind that they, too, have a Master in heaven. The heavenly Master speaks loud and clear that slavery is another of those ills that will be wiped out when the gospel takes full hold of people.

Life-Application Approach:

Icebreaker: Count the fingers on your hands. Are there ten? If you are missing a digit, how did it happen? Why might you wish you could reverse time and have both your hands complete, “For we are all members of his body”? (Eph. 5:30, NIV).

Take a moment to recall members that are consistently missing from your Sabbath School or congregation. How does their absence make you incomplete, even handicapped? Discuss what you could do to “turn back time” and reclaim them.

Thought Questions:

1. Think about a time when you made a glaring mistake in a very public way. How did you get over it? Why is that situation still so vivid? Someone might say, “It’s like it just happened yesterday.” Jesus forgave the paralytic (see Luke 5:23) before He healed him. Why was this so important? How can Jesus help you move from failures in the past to a miraculous new life now?

2. When we present cooking schools, we show attendees how to make new dishes. We demonstrate ways to lead healthier lives. “God demonstrates his own love toward us” (Rom. 5:8, NKJV) through salvation and the power to live victorious lives. How does the concept of submission (Eph. 5:21, 24, 29) bless our relationships at home, at church, and where we work? How can we prevent the call to submit to one another from becoming an opportunity to abuse or dominate others, or to become a “doormat”?

Application Question:

Consider the choices you had to make this morning as you prepared for your day. How did you decide whether or not to shower, what to wear, and what to have for breakfast? Jude invites us to “keep [ourselves] in God’s love” (vs. 21, NIV). What makes following this admonition possible? Why is our choice to be in a relationship with God so critical? This coming week, share why you choose to walk with God every day with one of your co-workers who is experiencing a difficult decision or a crisis.
**Further Study:** *Parents and children.* “Parents, God desires you to make your family a sample of the family in heaven. Guard your children. Be kind and tender with them. Father, mother, and children are to be joined together with the golden links of love. One well-ordered, well-disciplined family is a greater power in demonstrating the efficiency of Christianity than all the sermons in the world.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1118.

“The Lord Jesus has not been correctly represented in His relation to the church by many husbands in their relation to their wives, for they do not keep the way of the Lord. They declare that their wives must be subject to them in everything. But it was not the design of God that the husband should have control, as head of the house, when he himself does not submit to Christ. He must be under the rule of Christ that he may represent the relation of Christ to the church. If he is a coarse, rough, boisterous, egotistical, harsh, and overbearing man, let him never utter the word that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she must submit to him in everything; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 117.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Supposing you are made aware that one of your church members is involved in spousal abuse; how should the church handle the issue?

2. As a church, should we keep silent about important social issues, or should we get involved? Are there some issues better left alone? If so, how do we determine what they are? Also, discuss these questions: In what ways can getting involved in social concerns deflect us from our real mission? Or, are social concerns part of our real mission?

3. As a class, talk about the questions asked at the end of Tuesday’s and Wednesday’s lessons. What are the forces working against our families, and what can you as a class do that could help local church members as they face these assaults?
The Christian Warfare

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19; Luke 22:31; Rom. 7:15-20; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Rev. 12:9.

Memory Text: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV).

The reality of the war. The Bible begins with two great accounts. First, God created a perfect world and placed Adam and Eve in stewardship of this perfect world (Gen. 1:27, 28). Second, Satan led Adam and Eve into a rebellion against God, bringing that world and the entire humanity under the curse of sin (Genesis 3). The Bible also proclaims two great accounts of good news. First, God sends His Son to this earth to die for the sins of the world and reconcile the fallen humanity unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:14-18). The Cross and the resurrection of Christ ensure the ultimate destruction of sin and Satan at the end of the world. The second part of the good news is that God will create the new heaven and new earth as the home of the saints (John 14:1-3).

Between these accounts the Inspired Word traces the perils and the progress of the great war between Christ and Satan, a war that we are all involved in. This week we look at Paul’s words on how we can be victorious.

The Week at a Glance: How real is the Christian warfare? Ultimately, what kind of battle are we in? What are some of the wiles of the devil? Where and how do we fight this enemy? What promises do we have of victory over Satan?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.
Finally . . . the War

Paul begins his narration of the Christian warfare with the words “Finally, my brethren” (Eph. 6:10). The word finally makes a forceful point. Thus far, Paul has outlined how God has redeemed us from sin through Christ, sealed us by His Spirit, brought us into a fellowship of unity, and made us a family of God. As members of this new family, God expects us to “walk worthy of [His] calling” (Eph. 4:1, NKJV) by putting away the old sinful life; by putting on the new transformed being; by walking in purity, in love, in light, in wisdom, and in godly relationship with all. The Christian life and walk should be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 5:18).

But there is a demonic, evil spirit working against the Christian. Satan desires to have us, as he did Peter (Luke 22:31). So, Paul says, “Finally, my brethren,” get ready for the daily battle against Satan. The word finally provides a summary or a conclusion. But the Greek word can be rendered better by the phrase “From henceforth” or “From now on.”

Read Luke 22:31. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that Satan desired to “sift” Peter? What does it mean when Satan “sifts” a person?

Read Ephesians 6:10. As Paul begins this exhortation, what’s his point? How are we to fight? What hope does God’s Word give us that we can be victorious?

Paul has spoken of God at work in Christ for us. The coming of Christ in history has introduced a new and powerful dimension in the cosmic battle between God and Satan. Christ’s victory over Satan on the cross has become the basis of the believer’s acceptance before God. But the believers should know that their journey to the kingdom has just begun. “From now on,” they have many battles to fight, a cunning enemy to contend with, and a war to win “against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). “With full assurance of faith we may expect that He will unite His omnipotence with the efforts of human instrumentalities, for the glory of His name. Clad with the armor of His righteousness, we may gain the victory over every foe.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 111.

Think about a time you were victorious in a spiritual battle and a time you failed. What made the difference?
**Key Text:** Ephesians 6:10-12

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To understand that, as Christians, we are involved in a war between God and Satan.
2. To stress that, in a real sense, we ourselves are the disputed prize in this war.
3. To draw our attention to the necessity of God’s power to our eventual victory.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Christian Warfare** (Eph. 6:12)
   A. Conversion is not an ending point but the beginning of a struggle.
   B. The struggle is not only against our own worst impulses but against demonic agencies.
   C. One’s acceptance of Christ should make us conscious, dedicated enemies of Satan, just as he is of us.

II. **Wiles of the Devil** (Eph. 6:11)
   A. Many of the ways in which Satan attempts to lead us away from God seem harmless, even laudable.
   B. The one thing that may indicate the origin of these strategies is their tendency to draw our attention from God to ourselves or to other incidentals.
   C. Avoiding obvious sin is not enough; Satan can deceive us with our own “righteousness.”

III. **Be Strong in God’s Might** (Eph. 6:10)
   A. To avoid believing in lies, we must immerse ourselves in God’s truth.
   B. Knowing God and His truth enables us to use and experience His power.
   C. God’s power goes only to those who submit themselves completely to Him.

**Summary:** In becoming Christians, we take sides in the war between Christ and Satan, the war from which all other wars and conflicts derive. Not only are we participants, we are also the prize to be claimed. We can take comfort in the fact that Christ has already laid claim to us and will not give us up as long as we cling to Him.

**COMMENTARY**

Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with thanksgiving for “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3), and now he closes the letter with a reference to a warfare (6:10-12) that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7). The story of this war is the great controversy between Christ and Satan that is now being fought between the forces of evil and God’s people. The Ephesian Epistle outlines how God created the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and how God expects His family to walk in all purity and unity. But the walk is neither easy nor trivial. Our study this week focuses on the
“The Wiles of the Devil” (Eph. 6:11)

Paul’s description of the spiritual warfare begins with a general warning to be aware of the “wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

What are the wiles of the devil? The devil does not always or necessarily attack the believer in the most obvious and evil ways. Often his ways are subtle, and his appeals may appear to uphold higher and nobler motives. Note two examples: First, the high motive he offers in his temptation to Eve in Genesis 3:1-5; second, the eagerness to establish the Messianic kingdom on earth with which he filled the mind of Judas.

In his book The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis presents a series of imaginary letters that Screwtape, a senior demon, writes to a junior partner not experienced in the skillful art of tripping the saints. For example, when John is praying for his mother who is suffering from rheumatism, Screwtape advises the junior demon not to cause John to lose faith in prayer. Instead, John should be encouraged to pray for his mother at all times; meanwhile, John’s attention should be diverted from the necessity of massaging his mother’s aching joints.

In another letter, Screwtape suggests that Christians must be encouraged to worry and fret over great and grave issues in order to divert their attention from real and immediate problems. The name of the game, says Screwtape, “is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood.”—(London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1956), pp. 128, 129.

Look up the following texts: How, in each case, can we see how Satan works? Do any of these methods seem especially familiar to you?

Job 2:9

Zech. 3:1

Mark 4:15

Luke 22:3

2 Cor. 2:10, 11

1 Thess. 2:18

2 Pet. 3:4

Rev. 12:12
reality of this war, the wiles of the adversary, and the need for Christian readiness to face the enemy.

I. Christian Warfare: Its Reality (Eph. 6:10-12)

The apostle affirms, in no uncertain terms, the reality and the cosmic nature of this war. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). This is our war; there’s no way we can escape it, except to be on God’s winning side. The war is a test of our allegiance. On whose side are we? Christ’s or Satan’s? Upon whom are our thoughts and affections? Whom do we love and serve? The war is Satan’s studied scheme to defeat God’s plan for His people and to keep us away from Him. As surely as sin has made the war real, so surely the Cross has made the victory certain. But the war has to be waged.

“Many look on this conflict between Christ and Satan as having no special bearing on their own life; and for them it has little interest. But within the domain of every human heart this controversy is repeated. Never does one leave the ranks of evil for the service of God without encountering the assaults of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 116.

Nothing delights Satan as much as a denial of his existence and human indifference to this warfare. Liberal theology may see the biblical portrayal of Satan as an embarrassing explanation of human inadequacy. Psychology may see it as a result of cultural deficiency of a primitive mode. Science may have no interest in the subject at all, and philosophy continues its metaphysical battle on the nature of good and evil, without focusing on its real cause. On the face of it all, what matters to the Christian is what the Word of God says. The Bible has no reservation in recognizing the origin, the workings, and the eventual extinction of demonic forces. Jesus specifically asked His believers to pray for deliverance from “the evil one” (Matt. 6:13, NIV). The whole biblical witness testifies that God sent His Son to crush the devil and deliver Satan’s captives. Satan assumes himself to be the god of this world, blinding the minds of the unbeliever (2 Cor. 4:3). If not resisted, he can cause havoc in moral and spiritual life (Acts 5:3, 1 Pet. 5:8). So, the need is real to face this war squarely.

II. Christian Warfare: The Wiles of the Devil (Eph. 6:11)

Paul makes three facts clear about this warfare. First, this war is not against “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12). We are not fighting human beings, even wicked ones. Indeed, we are to love all people and, if possible, to live peaceably with all (Rom. 12:18). Second, this war is against demonic forces, “rulers of the darkness” and
The Enemy We Face

How does Paul describe the enemy we face? What is he really saying to us about the kind of battle we are engaged in? Eph. 6:12.

First, our primary enemy is not “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12)—that is, not human. Selfishness, pride, egotism, and anti-Christian hostility are all forces Christians have to contend with, but there are cosmic powers greater than all these working to disconnect our relationship with God.

Second, our enemy is described as “principalities,” “powers,” and “rulers of the darkness of this age” (vs. 12, NKJV). They are “spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil” (vs. 12, Philips). The description is frightening but real, indicating superhuman, cosmic, demonic forces that contend for our allegiance in opposition to God. Whose shall we be? Satan’s or God’s? That’s the central pursuit of the Christian warfare, the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

Satan is our adversary. A relentless and formidable foe, he is a vicious fighter, lurking “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV). He is the accuser (Rev. 12:10), a liar and murderer (John 8:44). He has sinned from the beginning (1 John 3:8), perverts the way of the Lord (Acts 13:10), “deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9, NKJV), wars against God’s remnant church (Rev. 12:17, NKJV), persecutes the saints (Rev. 2:10), can appear even as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), and, at the end of this age, will lead all those opposed to God in a final battle to overthrow His rule (2 Thess. 2:4-10). It is against this superhuman being and his army of fallen angels that Christians are engaged in a constant and continuous warfare. “In every soul two powers are struggling earnestly for the victory. Unbelief marshals its forces, led by Satan, to cut us off from the Source of our strength. Faith marshals its forces, led by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Hour by hour, in the sight of the heavenly universe, the conflict goes forward. This is a hand-to-hand fight, and the great question is, Which shall obtain the mastery?”—Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God, p. 328.

In your own life, how have you experienced this struggle between these two forces? In what ways is the battle manifested? How well does Satan hide? How aware are you of what’s really going on?
“against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). Third, our enemy is crafty and cunning—so cunning that he may appear as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Therefore, Paul alerts us against the craftiness and deceit of the devil (Eph. 6:11).

These deceptions or “wiles” aim at thwarting God’s purpose through subtle ways. “Satan . . . will bring in subtle fallacies to darken and confuse the mind and root out the doctrines of salvation. Those who do not accept the Word of God just as it reads, will be snared in his trap.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 2, p. 52. Consider some of the lies Satan presents in opposition to God’s truth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOD’S TRUTH</th>
<th>SATAN’S DECEPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. In the beginning God created.</td>
<td>1. Life is a result of evolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sin is transgression of God’s law.</td>
<td>2. Sin is a myth; there are only failures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. In Christ God creates a new community.</td>
<td>3. Humanity is evolving toward newness.</td>
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<td>4. In Christ God broke down all dividing walls.</td>
<td>4. Differences promote growth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Satan deceives God’s saints.</td>
<td>5. There is no Satan; he is a result of human imagination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. God wants His church to be united.</td>
<td>6. Unity insists on uniformity.</td>
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Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 35:4, Daniel 10:19, Romans 7:15-25, Ephesians 6:10-12

1 While Joshua stood on the border of the Promised Land, he must have thought about the many challenges he would face. The Ephesian church also confronted many challenges. What makes the difference between victory and defeat in Christian warfare? How do Joshua 1:9 and Ephesians 6:10 provide an anthem of hope?

2 Being forewarned provides the opportunity to be forearmed. Read Ephesians 6:11 and Luke 22:31. How does knowing Satan’s plans for our failure help us prepare for encounters with him? If we fight in our own power, what will be the outcome? What can you suggest to someone who is struggling without God’s help?

3 Computers work well until they are unplugged and the battery is depleted. How is Satan working in your life to disconnect you from the Source of power you most need? How long have you been running on battery trying to fend off evil by using your own resources? Take time to reprioritize your daily schedule with the intention of taking time to reconnect with God.
“Be Strong . . . in the Power of His Might”

The word **wrestle** (see Eph. 6:12), as used to describe the Christian warfare, indicates two things. First, it is like a hand-to-hand combat, as in wrestling. Second, the enemy is as close and immediate as the opponent in wrestling. The enemy is both subtle and audacious in his attempts to deceive those who have their faith and loyalty rooted in Christ. Victory in this warfare depends on three fundamental principles of Christian life and faith: “Be strong” (vs. 10); “Put on the whole armor of God” (vs. 11, NKJV); and “Stand” (vss. 11, 13, 14). Today’s lesson will focus on the first essential; the other two will be examined later.

The phrase “Be strong” appears in the New King James Version more than thirty times, three of which are in the New Testament. In most cases, the expression signifies God’s call to face fearlessly the enemy in either physical or spiritual conflict. The call suggests that God is saying “Your strength comes from Me. Therefore, be strong, and be not afraid.” Look up the following texts and note the assurance offered in each one, despite the varying circumstances. How could you apply that admonition to yourself and whatever struggles you are now facing? *Josh. 10:25, Isa. 35:4, Dan. 10:19, 1 Cor. 16:13.*

Paul’s call is to “be strong in the Lord” (Eph. 6:10). God’s eternal foe can be fought only by his opponents being on the side of God. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6, NKJV). Spiritual hosts of wickedness cannot be fought by human strength, however great and refined and morally precise that human strength may be, but only by spiritual forces. Nothing short of the power that flows from God through the Holy Spirit will suffice in fighting the evil one. “Without Me,” said Jesus, “you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NKJV). To this Paul adds: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57, NKJV). His grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9).

Paul adds one more specific to “Be strong in the Lord.” The strength from the Lord flows from the “power of His might” (Eph. 6:10, NKJV). Already, in Ephesians 1:17-21 Paul prays that we would experience God’s power as He displayed it in Christ’s resurrection. In Ephesians 2:1-7 the apostle explains how he hopes we will experience this power. Just as God was able to raise Christ from the dead, so He is able to raise us from death in sin to newness of life in Christ, and it is in this resurrection power that we ought to fight “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12, NIV).
The devil’s deceptions are not limited to doctrines alone; they extend to every situation where Christ lovingly demands and expects His disciples to obey. Such a subtle war requires utmost vigilance on our part in order to detect the trap and to continue to rely on Jesus, who alone assures victory.

III. Christian Warfare: the Need for Readiness (Eph. 6:10)

Paul knows the war’s reality and the enemy’s determination to get us away from God (Luke 22:31, 32). Paul calls upon all believers: “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10). The strength to fight the foe cannot come from within us, but from Jesus. “Without me ye can do nothing,” said Jesus (John 15:5).

Witnessing

Oh yes, there’s a major battle going on; one so important that the fate of each human being hangs in the balance. The battle is between right and wrong, between good and evil, between the children of God and the legions of darkness. However, even while the battle roars, God’s followers know the outcome. And that is why it is important to share the good news of salvation with those who have yet to learn of Christ and the eternal life He gives to all who will accept it.

Believers are responsible for showing nonbelievers how Satan has earned the title Master of Morph, how he has been able to convince people through the ages to soften and demystify his image from the personification of evil to the rather harmless and inoffensive, even somewhat romantic, figure portrayed in various media.

Believers have the responsibility to show nonbelievers that Satan is lying when he asserts that people have the power within themselves to change their life; to use their core “self” to take full control of their destiny. He knows that only God can change lives for the better, but he desperately needs to keep God and His Son out of the picture!

Believers have the responsibility to warn nonbelievers not to be fooled for a single moment by Satan’s manipulative tactics. Believers see his ruse of innocence for what it really is—a treacherous deception. He is real; and he continues to be every bit as dangerous as God says he is.

Finally, believers have the responsibility to tell everyone they know the good news—that in the end, Satan will fail. He will lose his hold on this planet, and he will be destroyed. Through faith in Christ, God’s followers will overcome Satan’s inflictions of pain. They look forward to the better world they have been promised. And nothing . . . nothing will keep them from God’s side much longer!
“Put On . . . Stand”

Having issued the call to “be strong . . . in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10, NKJV), Paul gives what admonition to the believers? What does he tell them to do, and why? Eph. 6:11.

In ourselves we have neither the strength of the will nor the tenacity of endurance to face the devil. By nature we are sinners (Rom. 3:23). Sin has separated us from God (Isa. 59:2), made us its slaves (John 8:34, Rom. 6:16), and corrupted our minds and consciences (2 Cor. 3:14, 2 Tim. 3:13).

Look up the following texts. What role do we have in this battle against Satan and sin? Are we to be passive, or is there a battle we must endure? Matt. 16:24; Luke 13:24; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 2:3; Phil. 4:1; James 5:10, 11; 1 Pet. 4:1.

Even though Christ has defeated Satan on the cross and gives that victory to us, our new life is not without its perils. As Herman Ridderbos, a noted New Testament theologian, points out: The satanic powers, “however much already vanquished in Christ, have not yet become harmless. But in order to be able to contend against them suitably, the church has received an armor from God, so richly furnished that it is able to continue to stand.”—Paul: An Outline of His Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 392.

It is with this armor that God sends us into battle against “spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Eph. 6:12, NKJV). This armor is more than adequate to deal with Satan’s deceptive schemes. Satan is a cunning enemy and will not fight fair. He will use every trick he can—from turning into a talking serpent (Genesis 3) to masquerading as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Hence Paul’s twofold admonition: “Put on.” “Stand.”

“Put on” is a command to take something that does not originate with us. Anything that springs from within us is totally insufficient to meet the foe. “Put on” also indicates the idea of permanence; the Christian cannot live for a moment without the “armor of God” (Eph. 6:11, NKJV)—and it must cover the entire being, from head to toe, from thought to action. In Ephesians 6:11-14, four times Paul urges the believers to “stand”—hold the ground, resist the enemy, be awake and alert, and never surrender. Victory is ours.

If you know someone who is going through “hand-to-hand” combat with Satan right now, why not spend time with that person? Besides prayer, what other things can you do to help?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: As the new year approaches, consider some of your past resolutions. How long did you keep them? In what ways have you found God’s presence in your life a golden key to success?

Thought Questions:
1. “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Satan has included each of our names in his request to be our ruler. How does this make you feel? What Bible promises assure us we are not alone in our battle against evil? (See Rev. 12:9 and Isa. 35:4.) In your Sabbath School class, share a season of prayer asking for God’s presence in each member’s life.

2. Take a few moments to contemplate what it must have been like to live in a perfect world—a place without sin, despair, or evil. How does such a place look in your mind? Do you see bright colors, hear beautiful music, or feel the solace of complete peace? Now contrast this world with the one in which we live. Why does Paul say “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Eph. 6:10, NIV)? How is this possible?

Application Question:
The Cross and the Resurrection cut across the failure of humanity with an offering of hope. Scripture contains many examples of our Savior sharing very personal encouragement with those “who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8, NIV). Read Daniel 10:19 over and over until you have it memorized. Write it on a card, including your own name. Then post it where you see it each morning. Share with others how important it is to have God’s peace and power at work in your life, and theirs.
**Further Study:** *The cosmic war.* “In the Word of God are represented two contending parties that influence and control human agencies in our world. Constantly these parties are working with every human being. Those who are under God’s control and who are influenced by the heavenly angels, will be able to discern the crafty workings of the unseen powers of darkness. Those who desire to be in harmony with the heavenly agencies should be intensely in earnest to do God’s will. They must give no place whatever to Satan and his angels.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

"Warfare as a lifelong conflict." “The enemy will use every argument, every deception, to entangle the soul; and in order to win the crown of life, we must put forth earnest, persevering effort. We must not lay off the armor or leave the battlefield until we have gained the victory, and can triumph in our Redeemer.

“As long as we continue to keep our eyes fixed upon the Author and Finisher of our faith we shall be safe. But our affections must be placed upon things above, not on things on the earth. By faith we must rise higher and still higher in the attainments of the graces of Christ. By daily contemplating His matchless charms, we must grow more and more into His glorious image.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 105.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and discuss what insights you find on spiritual warfare.

2. Satan’s wiles often involve a subtle combination of truth with error (for example, the common tendency to equate material prosperity as God’s approval and blessing on one’s life). What are other examples of this mixture of truth and error Satan uses to deceive?

3. Is there an individual or a group of people your class knows who is in the midst of a deep spiritual struggle? What practical things can you, as a class, do that can show these people your care and support?
The Christian Armor

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 14:6; 18:38; Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 5:8.

Memory Text: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13, NKJV).

The whole armor of God. “The Christian life is a battle and a march. In this warfare there is no release; the effort must be continuous and persevering. It is by unceasing endeavor that we maintain the victory over the temptations of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 453.

While we cannot escape our warfare with Satan, we are given two assurances. First, Christ has already defeated Satan on the cross, and His victory is ours (Gal. 2:20); second, Christ has provided us a “whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11, NKJV). Do not miss Paul’s point about the “whole” armor. The apostle lists at least six items that make up this armor. We need them all, because all are forged and furnished by God as one unit, and we cannot afford to neglect one part without weakening the entire armor. This week we’ll study five of the six, saving the last one for next week.

The Week at a Glance: What is the biblical concept of “truth”? What is the “breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14)? How crucial is the “gospel of peace” (vs. 15) to the Christian faith? How does faith protect us from Satan’s assaults? What is the “helmet of salvation” (vs. 17)?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 24.
“Gird Your Waist With Truth” (Eph. 6:14, NKJV)

“What is truth?” (John 18:38). Pilate asked Jesus perhaps one of the most important and frequently asked questions in life. Human beings have probed the question throughout history. Consider some of the possible answers: Truth is what’s logical; truth is what works; truth is relative; truth is testable observation; truth is what my religion or priest tells me.

Look up the following texts; how do they help us understand the biblical concept of truth?

Ps. 31:5, Isa. 65:16

Ps. 43:3

Ps. 86:11, 3 John 4

John 14:6

John 14:17

John 17:17

Ultimately, the Christian view of truth is not merely a concept, not a philosophic position, not a rational and logical statement. To a Christian, truth is a Person: Jesus Christ, in whom “the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19, NKJV) and His truth are revealed. The Truth that is Jesus is a saving, redeeming truth: It calls for a death to sin; it calls for a life of righteousness, moral integrity, spiritual coherence, and a faithfulness to God’s expectations in all relationships. Truth involves not only what we believe but also what we do. Only unreserved commitment to Christ can arm each one of us with truth in a world of sin and deception. Hence Paul’s admonition elsewhere: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14, NKJV).

In New Testament times, a Roman soldier tied a belt around his waist to hold up his clothing so he could march without any impediment. The Christian’s belt is truth. Jesus, the Truth, must so envelop our entire being that what we are within or what we are without do not become a hindrance in our spiritual warfare. Our talk and our walk, our worship and our work, will reveal we are subject to Him who is the truth and in whom there is no variation.

How would you answer the questions “What is truth?” and “What does knowing truth do for you?”
Key Text: Ephesians 6:13

Teachers Aims:
1. To stress that Christ has already defeated Satan.
2. To understand that we already share in that victory if we claim the gifts God has given to us.
3. To demonstrate that Christ’s protection of us is sufficient, whether or not we feel deserving of it.

Lesson Outline:
I. The Whole Armor of God (Eph. 6:13)
   A. Warfare with Satan is inescapable for the Christian, and he is the deadliest foe we can have.
   B. Satan is, ultimately, powerless against Christ and against us, to the extent that we are in Christ.
   C. Christ’s help to us in this struggle is conceptualized by Paul as armor.

II. The Belt of Truth (Eph. 6:14)
   A. The whole armor of God Paul speaks of represents the various aspects of the Christian message.
   B. The Christian message is not complete or effective if we ignore or forego any one aspect.
   C. Faith, “above all,” is central to the Christian’s personal success in the spiritual struggle.

III. Hope of Salvation (Eph. 6:17)
   A. Satan, and life itself, will give us many reasons to doubt our experience of God.
   B. The faith that enables us to withstand this doubt is not merely a belief in certain doctrines but a personal trust in Jesus.
   C. This personal trust is the only personal quality that makes any difference in our final destiny.

Summary: The Bible teaches us that Satan has been defeated by Christ. While we as fallible humans remain vulnerable to Satan’s attacks, we can also claim the protection Christ provides for us in His victory. Again, the key is our complete willingness to submit to Christ’s authority and to trust in Him.

COMMENTARY

Paul takes this warfare very seriously. Consider the forceful terms he uses to urge the Christians to face the evil one: “Be strong”; “put on”; “stand”; “having done all, to stand”; etc. (Eph. 6:10-13). He repeats the command “stand” four times, emphasizing that nothing short of continual watchfulness and readiness are needed to win the battle. Such an experience involves putting on the whole armor of God.
The Breastplate of Righteousness  (Eph. 6:14)

The second part of the Christian armor is the breastplate of righteousness. If God’s truth as revealed in Christ forms the foundation of Christian life and integrity, that life needs to be guarded by the breastplate of righteousness. A Roman soldier wore a large metal plate from his neck to thigh to protect his vital organs from enemy attack—something like the bulletproof vests of today. The Christian life is protected not by a breastplate made of metal but by the righteousness that has its source and means in God.

How does Paul describe this righteousness? How is it revealed, how is it received, and what does it do for the one who possesses it?  Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Righteousness is a distinctive characteristic of God Himself (Isa. 59:17, Rom. 3:26, 2 Tim. 4:8), and this has been revealed through Christ, who has redeemed us from sin (Rom. 1:16, 17). It is through this righteousness revealed in Christ that God has justified us (3:25, 26)—that is, He declared us to be righteous and has forgiven our sins. Christ’s righteousness thus makes a right relationship with God possible. Surely, then, there is no greater protection against Satan’s attacks than being in a right relationship with God.

“Christ our righteousness” is, therefore, our breastplate. To stand with God, to be robed with the righteousness of Christ, to be forever faithful to God’s saving grace, is to give notice to the devil: “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?” (Rom. 8:31-34, NKJV).

How will righteousness as a right relationship with God be seen in the Christian’s daily life?  Rom. 6:10-14.

Righteousness, as a right relationship with God, must lead to right living. It is a call to discipleship, where one’s life is consistent with the character of the One who calls, with Christ Himself. To be righteous is to be like Christ—in obedience to God’s law, in moral rectitude, in a life of uprightness and integrity, in extending the love of Christ to all.

How do we put on the breastplate of righteousness? How does this “putting on” relate to the “Christ . . . in me” experience described in Galatians 2:20? Does putting on righteousness call for putting off something else? If so, what?
I. The Armor: “The Whole Armour of God” (Eph. 6:13)

Most every product gives details about its origin, and that label says much about the product’s worth and reliability. “Made in Japan” gives a product greater reliability than made in someplace that is not so well reputed. The Christian armor is made in heaven, and every part of it is as reliable as the One who made it: God. The apostle’s command, “Put on the whole armour of God” (Eph. 6:11), expects us to remember two essentials. First, the armor is by God, of God, and from God. No part of this armor is human made. Humanity, however strong and sufficient we may pretend to be, is powerless in the making or functioning of the armor. Its only role is to recognize its nothingness, put on the armor, and take on the enemy in the power of Jesus. Second, Christian warfare demands that we put on the whole armor. We cannot afford to reject or neglect even one part of it. “The power of his might” (Eph. 6:10) is found in the whole armor, and only as we put on its entirety can we “be strong” (vs. 10) and “be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (vs. 11).

II. The Armor: Defensive Weapons (Eph. 6:14-17)

From his continued exposure to Roman soldiers, perhaps with his hand tied to one of them, Caesar’s famous prisoner is aware of the Roman armor and reflects upon an even more powerful armor that a Christian is privileged to have. That armor has six components. Our study this week covers the first five defensive ones; next week we take up with the offensive one.

1. “Having your loins girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14). The Roman soldier wore a belt to hold his flowing robes firm to the body lest they come in the way of his fight. The Christian’s entire personality—intellect, emotions, ambitions, dreams, and pursuits—must be held firm without vacillation by the belt of truth. Not the philosophic, economic, scientific, or any other human equation of truth but the truth that is Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “Put . . . on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14). With the entire person girded about with Jesus the Truth, the Christian becomes completely truth-living, truth-telling, and truth-seeking. Against such Satan has no power.

Another lesson: In Roman times, a soldier without his belt was considered off duty. But Christian warfare knows no holiday. There never is a time when truth and integrity become options in the disciple’s life.

2. The breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14). The Roman soldier wore a breastplate made of heavy metal to protect his body between the neck and hips. The Christian also has a breastplate not made of any human device but by the righteousness of Christ.
For Feet, the Gospel of Peace *(Isa. 52:7, Eph. 6:15)*

**Read** Ephesians 6:15. What do you think Paul meant with this verse?

Because he was using military imagery in the other verses, Paul was apparently referring to the shoes, or boots, worn by the Roman army. Roman soldiers wore the kind of footwear that ensured a strong grip on the ground during combat. A soldier cannot afford to slide and fall when locked in battle with the enemy. Likewise, Christians, too, need to stand firm and unshakable in the gospel truth in order to be victorious in the spiritual warfare. The New English Bible translation of Ephesians 6:15 makes a telling point: “Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, *to give you firm footing*.” If feet are our foundation, and they need to be on firm footing for the whole body to remain stable, it shouldn’t be surprising that the “gospel of peace” is the foundation of what we believe. Indeed, no matter how important the other truths we have been given, everything needs to rest upon the foundation of the gospel message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone. It we don’t have that as a foundation, everything else will crumble.

**Read** the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12. What evidence in the texts shows us just how basic the gospel is to our message?

Notice, too, that Paul uses the phrase “the gospel of peace.” Peace in the Bible is not so much a negative term as it is a positive one. It stands for a tranquillity that comes as a result of victory over sin and self. It is a relational word—a relationship of reconciliation between us and God *(Rom. 5:1)* and of togetherness between ourselves as the human community, particularly as the community of faith. So, Christians are told to pursue peace at all times *(2 Tim. 2:22, 1 Pet. 3:11)*. An estranged relationship with either God or with one another places our Christian calling at risk and leaves us open to Satan’s wiles.

**Have you known the peace of the gospel? If not, what changes might you need to make in order to know this wonderful gift for yourself?**
Just as Christ the Truth becomes our belt to hold us tight to Himself, so Christ our righteousness acts as our breastplate, protecting every vital organ of spiritual life from the attacks of the foe. With Christ’s righteousness as our breastplate, “the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 312.

3. The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace (Eph. 6:15). The Roman soldier’s shoes had strong straps to be tied to the leg and studded nails to ensure a firm grip on the ground. A soldier cannot afford to stumble or slide. More so Christian soldiers. Their entire profession

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: John 14:6, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 6:13-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:8

1 God sent Truth into the world so we could experience Him. Jesus as Truth made flesh is not just ideology. It is action on behalf of others. Why do you think Paul invited us to “stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth” (Eph. 6:14, NKJV)? How does truth help us stand? How does Jesus’ example help provide an answer?

2 Imagine that your 12-year-old child (or grandchild) is sitting next to you. You are reading Ephesians 6:14 when he or she interrupts, “What is righteousness?” How would you explain it? Does your answer include a list of behaviors, attitudes, or actions? Where in Scripture would you go for help in answering the child’s question?

3 The three angels’ messages form the core of the message God has called us to proclaim. Paul depicts the everlasting gospel as shoes on the feet of the Christian warrior. How does Revelation 14:6-12 form the foundation of our mission? Why does Paul call these shoes “the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15)? How have you experienced peace in your life as a consequence of proclaiming the Advent message?

4 Compare, then discuss, Ephesians 6:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8. How are the “helmet of salvation” and “the hope of salvation” related? Why do Christians need to “wear” protection on their head? Share some of the challenges you have faced since you accepted salvation and the hope of the Second Coming. Why is a community of faith (the church) important?
The Shield of Faith (Eph. 6:16)

This passage tells us three things about faith as a vital part of the Christian armor:

First, “above all” take the shield of faith. “Above all” does not mean this item is the most important but that it is indispensable. What Paul says is this: “Besides all these” (Goodspeed) or “with all these” (NIV), make sure to take the “shield of faith.”

Second, faith is fundamental to Christian life and victory.

Read Hebrews 11:6. What does it tell us about the role of faith? How does it relate to Ephesians 6:16? How does James 2:18-20 help us understand what biblical faith is, and isn’t?

How do we understand the meaning of “faith” in these verses? It’s not so much to say “I believe that” but to assert “I believe in.” The former is a mental assent to a body of doctrines (Eph. 4:13), whereas the latter is a basic trust in God, a continual trust in His Word and in His promises. Such an abiding trust is absolutely necessary for faith to function as a shield.

“Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good. Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 253.

Such a faith empowers us “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph. 6:16, NKJV). Those flaming darts of the enemy come in different forms: temptation, doubt, lust, despair, trial, rebellion, guilt, etc.

The Roman shield was four feet high and two feet wide, made of strong wood and leather, with an iron frame. Shield in one hand and sword in another (our study next week), the soldier was equipped for both defense and offense. Faith in an unfailing God provides us absolute confidence to withstand Satan with all courage. God Himself “is a shield to those who put their trust in Him” (Prov. 30:5, NKJV).

In your own experience, what fiery darts has faith shielded you from? Doubt? Discouragement? Fear? Describe the process of how faith has worked in your behalf. What have you learned that you could share with others who might be getting pierced by those same attacks?
stands or falls with their unshakable and unwavering commitment to the gospel of Christ. Satan desires to shake this commitment, but Christian soldiers must not only stand firm for what they believe. They must remain devoted to proclaim the good news. The Christian footwear helps one stand with Christ in obedience and walk for Him in proclamation.

4. **The Shield of Faith** (*Eph. 6:16*). The Roman shield protected the whole body of the soldier as he moved it about to stop the flaming arrows. In Christian warfare, faith is a fundamental weapon. It protects the entire life and body of a Christian. Hebrews 11 is God’s unfailing disclosure that without faith it is impossible to please God, to fight the foe, or to walk the spiritual journey. Faith, not as a belief system but as trust and confidence in God. It is this that helps us not only overcome the attacks of the devil but also obtain the “victory that conquers the world” (*1 John 5:4, NRSV*).

5. **The Helmet of Salvation** (*Eph. 6:17*). A helmet is worn to safeguard the head, for any damage to the brain can be fatal. The brain is the seat of our will, the governor of our choices, and the

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**Witnessing**

Preparing for battle is a carefully orchestrated process. The battle plan is drawn, after which commanders and warriors review it time and time again. Mock battles are staged. Troops are drilled. They receive the type of nourishment required for strength and stamina. They practice suiting up in their protective gear. They learn they cannot go out into battle without their armor.

The soldiers are taught to listen carefully to directions. They are tested on how to avoid capture and, above all, how to follow instructions from the top. They also learn the price of failure and defeat. At all times, the victory prize is front and center for all to focus on.

The epic battle for planet Earth began 6,000 years ago. Two thousand years ago, the battle plan for victory was redeemed by the blood of God’s beloved and trusted Son, Jesus Christ.

During the past two millennia, God’s army of believers has engaged the enemy, Satan and his supporters, countless times. They are armed with the perfect battle plan—the plan of salvation. While some of God’s warriors are lost to the enemy and others stumble from time to time, all eyes remain fixed on the ultimate prize: the promise of heaven and eternal life.

This battle saga is far too important to keep quiet. It is meant to be shared with everyone who will listen. The heavenly Father is still recruiting, and it is up to all of His soldiers to enlist those who have not yet decided to join Heaven’s military divisions. They need to know that their victory is assured!
The Helmet of Salvation (Eph. 6:17, 1 Thess. 5:8)

Albert was young, handsome, intelligent, and very promising. He was the delight of his parents and a blessing to the small church community with which he shared his love of music, his computer skills, and his knowledge of the Bible. Children sought after him. The older ones knew for sure he would grow to be someone in whom their community could take pride. But on the day he turned 18, disaster struck Albert, plunging his parents into grief and the little Adventist community into unbearable sorrow. Within minutes after leaving home for a nearby store to get something an elderly neighbor needed, a speeding truck dashed Albert’s motorcycle from behind, and he landed on his head. “Severe head wounds,” the autopsy surgeon said. “If only he had been wearing a helmet. . . .”

A helmet is worn to safeguard the head. In many parts of the world the law requires the wearing of a helmet as a possible protection against varied hazards. In Paul’s time, a helmet, made of tough metal just as bronze or iron, was standard gear for soldiers. No sword could cut through it.

So it is in Christian warfare. Believers must put on their helmet to protect the center of their will, for here momentous decisions are made as to where their loyalty and hope shall rest. Paul identifies this “helmet” as the salvation we have been given in Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8, where Paul also used the image of a “helmet.” What does he call it? How does this verse help us understand what the image itself in both verses means?

As Christians, we have to live with the “hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). And we can have that hope, because that hope is in us; not in what we can accomplish but only in what Christ has done for us. If salvation were acquired by works or by how much we could achieve or by how holy we could become—who would not, eventually, give up in despair? The good news, however, is that Jesus’ works, His achievement, His holiness, is what gives us “the hope of salvation.” If this hope were based on anything else, that hope would sooner or later be lost.

Thus, though Satan often casts doubts on our salvation experience, we need not fear. As long as we remain in Christ, wearing that helmet of salvation, He is our assurance (John 6:37-39, Rom. 8:31-39, 1 Pet. 1:3-10).

If you were to die today, do you believe you would be saved? If so, why? If not, why not?
center of our thoughts. It is the place where life’s ultimate question is answered: *Who will I follow?* A saved person has already moved from Satan to Christ, and in order to remain in that position, he or she must wear “the hope of salvation” (*1 Thess. 5:8*). Salvation is a powerful weapon—it describes forgiveness for the past sins, empowerment to live a life of obedience now, and assurance for the future. The believers’ standing in the war depends upon their surety of the helmet of salvation. The helmet, in a way, summarizes all the defensive weapons of Ephesians 6.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** When you were little, what was your favorite article of clothing? How often were you successful in putting it on, even when Mom had set out something different? Why does Paul list the wardrobe a Christian should wear? (*See Eph. 6:13-17.*) Why are we so prone to make our own choices when these items provide more protection against the adversary’s attacks?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Our world offers many philosophies on which to base decisions. Jesus said “‘I am the way and the truth and the life’” (*John 14:6, NIV*). Look up at least one text for each of these three concepts. What was Christ trying to say about what He has to offer? Why is it so hard to let Him be involved in every aspect of our lives?

2. Imagine you are in Pilate’s judgment hall as he considers what to do with Jesus. How would you answer his question “What is truth” (*John 18:38*)? How would you help Pilate discover what truth is in this situation? What clues or elements could he use to come to a decision? Discuss what you have learned about truth as a defensive weapon in the great controversy.

**Application Question:**

How do you feel about hats? Does your culture encourage them, or are they only an optional fashion accessory? In *1 Thessalonians 5:8*, we are invited to put on “the hope of salvation as a helmet” (*NIV*). What makes that possible? Take a few moments to write out your personal faith statement. In what ways does this mission statement focus and clarify your life? How does it provide a foundation for making choices? How would your faith statement today differ from one you might have written five years ago? What experiences have caused this change?
**Further Study:** The heavenly armor. “If we have on the heavenly armor, we shall find that the assaults of the enemy will not have power over us. Angels of God will be round about us to protect us.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

*The girdle of truth.* “There is absolutely no safeguard against evil but truth. No man can stand firm for right in whose heart the truth does not abide.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 179.

*The breastplate of righteousness.* “All who have put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 31.

*The shield of faith.* “Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. As a class, discuss the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What do the various answers tell us about ourselves and our understanding of salvation?

2. Many identify truth with a set of doctrines only. Is there a relationship between truth and doctrine? Can one be doctrinally correct yet not have truth? At the same time, can someone have truth but not have correct doctrines? Discuss.

3. How is the shield of faith strengthened? How is it weakened?

4. As a class, discuss the crucial difference between the assurance of salvation and the dangerous doctrine of “once saved, always saved.”
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Ps. 119:9, 11; Mark 13:33; Eph. 6:17-24; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:8.

Memory Text: “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18, RSV).

COMMUNION AND CONDUCT. Everything the apostle has spoken so far in the Epistle—from the origin of our life to the mystery of the Cross that established one united family; from the joy of salvation to the responsibility of Christian living; from the creation of a new humanity to the reality of spiritual warfare—all have their grounding in the Word of God. Without God’s Word, inspired by and revealed through His Spirit, we would have no knowledge of His will and His purposes for us. It is through His Word He speaks directly to us.

And though God speaks to us, we must speak to God. Christian life demands both listening to what God says in His Word and speaking to Him through prayer. The Word and prayer provide power enough to withstand the evil one and to stay on God’s chosen path. This week, among other things, we’ll take a look at what Paul says to us about the role and power of God’s Word.

The Week at a Glance: What is the role of the Bible in the Christian life? What role does it play in the battle with sin? Why must Christians be watchful? What role must prayer have in our battle against the devil?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 31.
The Word and the Spirit

Take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17, NKJV).

Although Paul mentions the Word of God last in the six pieces that make up the Christian armor, it is not his intention to make it least in importance. The Word is foundational to Christian living. Without it we will not know who God is, who we are, how we came to be, what’s wrong with us, how we are saved from sin, what God has done through Christ, or what our ultimate destiny is. History bears witness that where the Bible is neglected, even for the briefest period, darkness of immense magnitude takes over. This is true in individual lives, as well as in the church as a corporate body. It is, therefore, not an accident that Paul places so crucial an importance on the Word of God in fighting life’s spiritual battles.

The Word of God is called “the sword of the Spirit.” What is the connection between the Spirit and the Bible? Summarize the answers given in the following verses:

- **John 14:26**
- **1 Cor. 2:10**
- **2 Pet. 1:21**

God’s revelation is seen in varied ways (Heb. 1:1-3). The wonder of the heavens, the beauties of nature, and the marvel of life all bear witness to the Creator God (Ps. 33:6-9). But God’s revelation through His Son Jesus and through the Written Word are unique in that the former brought us salvation from sin, and the latter bears witness to Jesus’ saving act (John 1:1-3, 14; 5:39; 17:17; Rom. 15:4). The Bible thus makes us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV).

Note what Paul says further on Scripture’s role in Christian life: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NKJV).

What are the forces in your culture that have the effect (whether intended or not) of weakening trust in the Bible as the Word of God? After identifying these forces, ask “What can I do to protect myself and others against them?”
The Christian life and victory in the war against Satan require that we be in continual contact with God, who has set up a communication system for us to keep in touch with Him and draw strength from Him: His Word through which He speaks to us, prayer through which we speak to Him, and our conduct through which we testify of Him.

Paul’s closing of the Epistle is a call for the Christian to live by the Spirit, live through prayer, and live in love.

I. Live by the Spirit (Eph. 6:17b)

The apostle Paul places the sword of the Spirit as the last of the six pieces that make up the Christian armor (vss. 13-17). While the
The Sword and the Battle

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus set an example for us in how we may rely upon God’s Word in our warfare with Satan. His experience in the wilderness teaches us two important lessons. First, spiritual warfare is real, and none of God’s children can escape from its reality or Satan’s vehemence. Satan does not attack his own. The closer we are to God, the more Satan tries to get us on his side (Job 1, 2). Second, it is not enough to know the Word; we must know the Author of the Word and trust in His promises. Satan tried to use the Word to cast doubt on God’s promises and purposes, but Jesus trusted the Word and followed God’s way. “Jesus met Satan with the words of Scripture. ‘It is written,’ He said. In every temptation the weapon of His warfare was the word of God. Satan demanded of Christ a miracle as a sign of His divinity. But that which is greater than all miracles, a firm reliance upon a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ was a sign that could not be controverted. So long as Christ held to this position, the tempter could gain no advantage.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 120.

**Note** from the following verses how the Word of God equips us in overcoming the assaults of Satan. Deut. 8:3; Ps. 119:9, 11; Matt. 4:4; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:4.

The Holy Spirit through whom we have obtained the new-birth experience (John 3:3-8) is the seal and guarantee of that experience (Eph. 1:13, 14). He dwells in us (Rom. 8:9, 11, 14; 2 Cor. 1:22), transforms our mind (Rom. 12:1, 2), and leads us in the understanding of Scripture (John 16:13, Eph. 1:17-23). It is the same Spirit that inspired the Word of God, and its indwelling power enables us to take up that Word as a sword to fend off Satan’s attacks. The Christian soldier must use that Word, “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12, NKJV), to penetrate and cut through, to discern right from wrong, and to distinguish between the voice of God and the whispers of the devil. That’s what makes the Word a weapon of both defense and offense.

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11, NKJV). That’s the testimony of the psalmist. That’s the experience of Jesus. What has been your own experience with the power of the Word in overcoming the assaults of Satan?
other five are defensive in nature, this one is offensive, and Paul identifies the sword of the Spirit as the Word of God. The Bible, whose origin is attributed to the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:21), not only makes us “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). It is the means through which God reveals His will and speaks to us. Even as we listen to the still, small voice of God breaking out of its sacred pages, its words are given “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:17). It is with this Word that Christ defeated Satan in the wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10, 11). “By what means did He overcome in the conflict with Satan?” asks Ellen White. “By the word of God. Only by the word could He resist temptation. ‘It is written,’ He said. . . . Every promise in God’s word is ours. ‘By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’ are we to live. When assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All its strength is yours. ‘Thy word,’ says the psalmist, ‘I have hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.’ ‘By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.’ Ps. 119:11; 17:4.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 123.

One caution, however. To know the Bible does not make it the sword. We must know the Author of the Bible, trust Him, and continually obey His demands. The soul that is so anchored in the Bible will lead a life against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

**II. Live Through Prayer (Eph. 6:18)**

Prayer is universal to all religions, but the difference between biblical prayer and other forms of prayer is that the former is a response to a promise of a personal God, and the latter are petitions to an impersonal, speculative force or ideology. The former is a dialogue; the latter is a monologue, such as the Pharisee’s prayer with himself (Luke 18:11). Prayer is speaking with God, listening to His voice, and rising up in full empowerment of God’s strength. It demands nothing of ourselves—except to deny self, lean on His strength, and wait on Him. Out of that waiting flows the power with which we can live the Christian journey and fight the spiritual warfare.

Although Paul does not list prayer as part of the armor, he does not fail to point out that none of the six parts of the armor can come to our defense without the power of prayer. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane assures the victory of the Cross. Prayer precedes the putting on the armor, holds the armor in place, and enables the armor to crush the forces of the enemy.

Paul considers prayer so important in the Christian life and warfare that he includes four universals: Pray always; pray with supplication in the Spirit; pray watchfully; pray for all the saints (see Eph. 6:18). Like the Pharisee (Luke 18:11), we often are tempted to pray for show, for ourselves, or simply as a routine. Paul would have none of it. Effective prayer is self-denying, Spirit-filled, intercessory,
Prayer and Christian Warfare

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18, NKJV).

In Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan describes a moving scene in which Christian encounters Apollyon in the great Valley of Humiliation. Apollyon, symbolic of satanic forces out to crush the saints on their march to God’s kingdom, attacks Christian with every weapon at his command. Armed with the sword of the Spirit, Christian puts up a valiant fight. In the midst of the deadly combat, Christian loses the sword. Apollyon rejoices that Christian’s doom is sealed, but Christian turns to another tested weapon called All-prayer, and the battle continues. Christian, using this weapon skillfully, defeats the enemy and raises a powerful shout of victory!

Read Ephesians 6:18. Though telling them to pray, Paul gives the Ephesians another admonition, one directly linked with prayer. What is it, and why is it so important? See also Mark 13:33, 1 Cor. 16:13, Col. 4:2, 1 Pet. 5:8.

Although Paul does not list prayer as part of the Christian armor, the apostle recognizes it as indispensable to Christian life and victory. “Praying always . . . being watchful to this end,” he says (Eph. 6:18, NKJV). Prayer is not only a fundamental essential to Christian daily living; it also carries an eschatological dimension. That is to say, prayer supplies not only strength for today but also hope for the coming end-time trials. A life girded with the armor of God—truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word—and linked with Him in prayer can be nothing but victorious over the evil one.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of prayer as a means of victory is in our Lord’s prayer life. Forty days of fasting and prayer, combined with His knowledge of and trust in God’s Word, prepared Him to defeat the devil in the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). The Gethsemane prayer, pouring out His soul in agony to know and obey God’s will, prepared Him for the crucial battle on the cross (Matt. 26:36-46).

Make a list of some of the things prayer does for you. Make a list of things prayer does not do for you. Be prepared to discuss your lists in class.
pleading for the needs of others, and, above all, for the fulfillment of God’s will on earth by being His faithful ambassadors, whether free or in chains (vs. 20). To keep foremost God’s priority and to keep ourselves in tune with God at all times, and in all places—this is the substance of Paul’s plea for prayer by both the individual Christian and the Christian community.

III. Live in Love (Eph. 6:23, 24)

Ephesians 1:1-4 contain the words grace, love, and peace. The closing two verses of Ephesians also have the same words. Of the three, the word love expresses most poignantly and, indeed, summarizes the theme of the Epistle that all believers are one in Christ and must live in love.

Paul sends the Epistle to Ephesus through Tychicus, “a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (vs. 21). Tychicus is charged to tell the Ephesian church all about Paul in prison and to be a comfort to the church.

Tychicus was a slave, and Paul had a pharisaic background. A potential wall of hatred and division stood between the two. But

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Isaiah 43:1-3, 10, 11; Mark 13:33; John 14:26; Ephesians 6:17-24; 2 Timothy 3:15-17

1. Recall a time when someone recommended a book that was a waste of your time to read. How did this impact your response to other suggestions this person might have given? How would you describe the benefits of reading the Bible? What information have you found in its pages? Would colleagues from work or neighbors trust you enough to act on your recommendation to explore God’s Word for themselves?

2. A sword is an instrument of battle that makes victory possible. Even though we witness evidence of God in nature and miracles, we still need to know God’s Word. Jesus even promises that the Holy Spirit will help us to remember promises and concepts in times of need (see John 14:26). What Scripture passages have you memorized that have blessed and helped you in times of distress?

3. In our memory text for this lesson, Ephesians 6:18, Paul uses the word all three times. Discuss the implications of this word. Consider time constraints and attitudes that dull our fervor and prevent our being totally inclusive with our prayers. Why is constant prayer as critical to our spiritual well-being as breathing is to our physical life?
Prayer and Christian Victory (Eph. 6:18-20)

In nonbiblical systems, prayer is the human’s quest for God, a search after the unknown. In the Bible, prayer is our response to God’s Word. He has spoken. He has promised. “Ask,” He has said (Matt. 7:7, Luke 11:9). We respond to His bidding. Thus, to a Christian, prayer is not the first word; it is the second. The first word is always God’s. Standing on the promise of God, we must pray. Listening to His Word and seeking Him in prayer make communication with God complete.

Prayer is often associated with the personal—our needs, our children, our families. The closer an individual is to our hearts, the more often we think of that person in our prayers. That is natural, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But it’s wrong when prayer is limited just to that inner circle and does not transcend to include the neighbor, the community, the church, and, above all, the hastening of God’s kingdom. Praying for others is not being magnanimous but rather acknowledging that the family of God is more inclusive than human nature would let us believe.

Read Ephesians 6:18-20. On the lines below, write a few notes about prayer: about how to pray, what to pray for, when to pray—anything at all you can learn from these verses about prayer.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Notice, too, the personal note Paul has in the midst of his words to the Ephesians. He asks them to pray for him. But what does he ask? That he be released from jail? That he have more personal comforts, such as better food? No! Instead, in a selfless request, he asks that they pray for him to be a bold witness for Christ and that he might speak “boldly, as I ought to speak” (vs. 20). What a subtle yet powerful insight into the mind of someone who’s dead to self.

To “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) requires that we order our lives according to God’s priority, so at any time and any place we are in tune with God’s will and purposes, and our life itself becomes a prayer, a testimony. How high is prayer among your priorities? What changes might you need to make in your life in order to give prayer the priority it should have?
Paul’s meeting Jesus on the Damascus road led him to the discovery that the Cross had demolished the wall of partition. This newfound truth led Paul to cross out the word Gentile against Tychicus and introduce him as an equal—a “beloved brother and faithful minister” (Eph. 6:21). Transition from one status to the other is the mystery of God—the mystery of the gospel of relations, the gospel of love without boundaries. Upon all those who accept and practice such a gospel, the apostle pronounces a benediction of love, peace, and grace (vss. 6:23, 24).

Witnessing

Each January, thousands of people resolve to make a difference in their lives by pledging to change. Perhaps some make a commitment to stop smoking, lose weight, exercise more often, spend more time with loved ones, volunteer for a favorite cause—the list is endless.

However, there is one resolution that tops the list: making the commitment to spend more quality time with God. Since the commitment has been made, why not take it one step further? Invite others to join you who have a real need to know God.

Depending on the group dynamics, the best place to start might be with an informal gathering at home for a systematic reading of the entire Bible. Start with the New Testament, since the four Gospels are a wonderful introduction of God’s great love for His sinful, earthly children. Discuss ways to apply God’s love to specific situations people in your group are facing.

Another way to spend special time with God is through regular church and Sabbath School attendance. Again, this is a perfect opportunity to invite others to come along.

Studying the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide on a regular basis and reading the Adventist Review from cover to cover (and sharing it with coworkers, friends, neighbors, etc.) are all ways to stay in touch with our heavenly Father and with the activities and blessings of His remnant church.

Last of all, the most precious way to reach up to God is through prayer, either in a group or one on one with Him. Earnest prayer opens up our hearts and minds and allows God to reach in . . . and to stay.

Talking with Him is possible anytime, day or night. It is possible anywhere, and there are no such things as a busy signal or voice mail. No prayer is too brief, too quiet, or too simple not to be heard by the Father and recorded in heaven. And we can count on every prayer being answered—in God’s way, in His time.

So, the commitment to building a stronger relationship with God has started with the new year. Keep the momentum going. Pledge to a lifetime of closer walks and talks with Him.
Christian Character (Eph. 6:21-23)

Paul concludes the Epistle as he began: with a gracious greeting in the name of Jesus. While we are aware there is no other name given under heaven by which we may be saved except the name of Jesus, it is imperative to realize there is no other name by which we can define our relationship with God and with one another and establish a common community of faith. The redeemed community is an in-Christ community. That theme dominates the Epistle, and with that theme the apostle concludes this great hymn for unity.

The closing verses of the Epistle affirm three wonderful traits of Christian character:

A common fellowship. With tender words Paul introduces to the Ephesians the messenger who was carrying his message to them: “Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (Eph. 6:21, NKJV). Before the Damascus Road encounter with Jesus, Paul could not have said those words about Tychicus. But in Christ crucified, Paul saw the walls between the Jew and the Gentile collapse (Eph. 2:14-18). He accepted Tychicus, a Gentile convert, as a beloved brother and a faithful minister. In such inclusiveness we see the glory of a common fellowship.

A common concern. The community in Christ reaches across all kinds of frontiers to affirm a common concern. The apostolic church had a custom of exchanging greetings, sharing news, and assisting in the needs of another congregation. In keeping with this custom, Paul informs the Ephesians that Tychicus will give an oral report on the conditions in Rome. Such concerns contribute to global awareness among churches.

A common heritage. The Christian heritage is an imperishable heritage, and it comes “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” to all those who love the Lord “in sincerity” (6:23, 24, NKJV). The Revised Standard Version translates the phrase to say “with love undying.” Christian discipleship calls for a permanency in relationship between believers and the Lord. “‘Abide in me, and I in you,’ said Jesus (John 15:4, NKJV). Those who have that undying, ever-abiding love relationship with the Lord are those who receive the heritage of peace, love, faith, and grace. With those great words, each a gem from God’s heavenly throne room, Paul closes the Epistle.

What does Paul’s reason for sending Tychicus to Ephesus reveal about Paul’s character? What does it tell us about what Christian character should be in general? See also Matt. 4:23-25, Gal. 6:2, Phil. 2:4, 1 John 3:16.
**Icebreaker:** At Pathfinder club meetings, we learned to march in unison by responding to the verbal commands of our leader. If one Pathfinder turned left when he or she was instructed to turn right, chaos jumbled our previously ordered ranks. Share a Pathfinder, or similar, memory. How do God’s commands “‘Be on guard! Be alert!’” (Mark 13:33, NIV) keep our lives and our salvation from disintegrating into chaos?

**Thought Questions:**

1. People seem to desire fanciful theories and bizarre discoveries. Witness the supermarket tabloids and television specials that share news on the odd and spectacular. People have even used the Bible to support theories that have led to fanaticism and physical harm. Second Timothy 3:15-17 commends Scripture to us as a gift to make us wise to salvation (see vs. 15). Discuss the implications this passage has for how to handle God’s Word. What is the “good work” (2 Tim. 3:17, NIV) Paul indicates as the result of studying the Bible?

2. Read Ephesians 6:18 several times in as many versions as you have. Discuss what it means to pray “on all occasions” (NIV) or “with all perseverance” (NKJV). What would be the practical results if we were to “always keep on praying” (NIV) for one another? Share the answers to prayer your group has already experienced. Spend a season of prayer together, asking God to multiply His activity on behalf of your congregation and its witness in your community.

**Application Question:**

One soap maker claims its product is 99.9 percent pure. The psalmist David points us to God’s Word as a source of purity and protection from sin (see Ps. 119:9, 11). Spend some quiet time with God. Read Scripture passages that talk about who God is. Consider Isaiah 40:21-31. How does recognizing our failure draw us to God, who is ultimately able and completely willing to recreate us in His image? Ask, in a personal way, for Him to cleanse your ways. Covenant to meet your Savior each morning to walk in newness of life and hope through His power and presence.
**Further Study:** The importance of prayer. “Prayer is the breath of the soul, the channel of all blessings. As . . . the repentant soul offers its prayer, God sees its struggles, watches its conflicts, and marks its sincerity. He has His finger upon its pulse, and He takes note of every throb. Not a feeling thrills it, not an emotion agitates it, not a sorrow shades it, not a sin stains it, not a thought or purpose moves it, of which He is not cognizant. That soul was purchased at an infinite cost, and is loved with a devotion that is unalterable.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 85.

*Praying always.* “Pray often to your heavenly Father. The oftener you engage in prayer, the closer your soul will be drawn into a sacred nearness to God. The Holy Spirit will make intercession for the sincere petitioner with groanings which cannot be uttered, and the heart will be softened and subdued by the love of God. The clouds and shadows which Satan casts about the soul will be dispelled by the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and the chambers of mind and heart will be illuminated by the light of Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 89.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Go back to the question about prayer at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. Compare lists. What have you learned from them? What misconceptions or false expectations, if any, might some people have about prayer? On the other hand, in what ways might we underestimate the efficacy and power of prayer?

2. If we are saved by grace, why is Christian character such an important aspect of our faith? Why does the Bible put such an emphasis on character?

3. If your class were to pen “an Epistle” to your local church warning them to be “watchful,” what things would you deem most important to watch for? If you were to pen an “Epistle” to the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, what would you write?