

Book 4
Epistles
Romans to Ephesians
Bible Study Series
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Ephesians

The Gospel of Relationships



International
Bible Training College



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EPHESIANS:

The Gospel of

***Jesus came
to tear down
the walls
that cause
hatred and
suffering.***

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.

Relationships

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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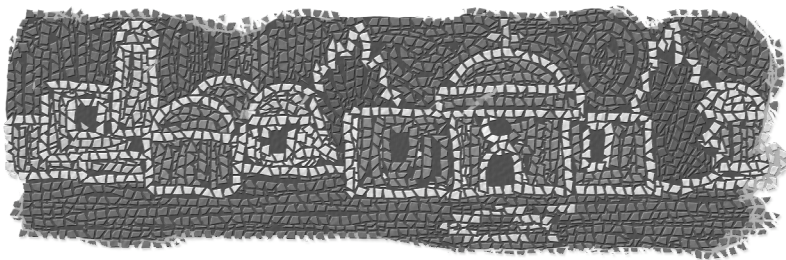
Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is a city of 15 million people. It has only one Adventist church. Other groups meet in unmarked rooms, difficult to find. Let's help them establish facilities for spiritual growth and nurture in this city, in one of the world's poorest countries.

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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 324x164 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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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.

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?

Read *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 281–297. Note the great challenges Ephesus posed to evangelism.

“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?

Bedside Evangelistic Series

by NATASHA YUNAK

It was an ordinary day, the kind we seldom remember until something unexpected happens. On Saturday evening as I prepared to bathe my two-month-old son, Florin, I noticed a lump on his body. We called the doctor, who told us to take Florin to the regional hospital in Tula, Russia, an eight-hour train ride away.

“Why Lord?” I prayed over and over as we made our way to the hospital and as we waited anxiously for the doctor to examine our son.

The doctor told us our son’s condition was not serious but that he needed surgery, which he had scheduled for two days later. He urged me to remain in the hospital with Florin and complete necessary paperwork while my husband returned home.

I was taken to a ward where other mothers waited with their children for surgery. I unpacked my bag and laid my Bible on the stand near the bed. One woman noticed the Bible and began asking questions. As I answered her questions, I noticed the other mothers were listening too. We talked for two hours about God, the Bible, and life. Then she asked for some Christian books to read. When the other women heard her request, they, too, asked for books. “And bring children’s books, too,” they added.

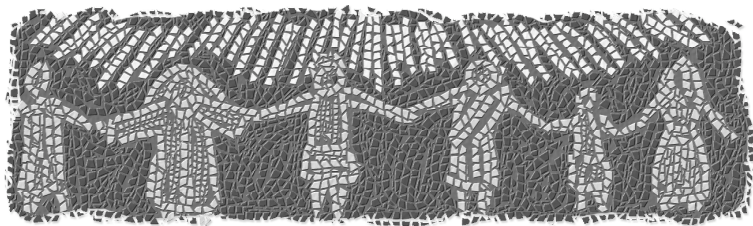
The next day my husband brought a box of books, which the women eagerly grabbed. The children’s ward became eerily silent as each mother began reading. Suddenly I understood that God had a purpose for our son’s unexpected emergency and was turning a crisis into a blessing. Every woman in the ward needed assurance of God’s love, and through us God was providing that assurance.

Later I invited the children to come and sing with me. I taught them songs of faith in Jesus. The mothers joined in with us as we sang. The dreary hospital ward was filled with songs of joy. The nurses heard the singing and came to see what was happening. Doctors and nurses from other wards stopped by. Some asked for books.

My son’s surgery was successful, and soon he was well enough to return home. I do not know how many people’s lives were changed as the result of our bedside evangelistic series, but I am just glad that God could use us in a surprising and unexpected way.

NATASHA YUNAK and her family live in western Russia.

Ephesians: Themes *in* Relationships



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 14:12; Acts 26:9-19; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:11-17; Eph. 3:11, 12; Col. 1:20, 21; Rev. 12:7.*

Memory Text: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (*Ephesians 1:3, NKJV*).

A letter of celebration. Last week we saw that as Paul’s third missionary journey drew to a close and as he was on his way to Jerusalem, he told the Ephesians they “ ‘will see my face no more’ ” (*Acts 20:25, NKJV*). He was right. Paul was soon arrested in Jerusalem and eventually imprisoned in Rome. Away from the pressures of the mission frontier and shut in Caesar’s prison, Paul reflected on his life as the apostle to the Gentiles (*Eph. 3:8*).

From the loneliness of imprisonment, the aged apostle celebrated the amazing fellowship in Jesus by writing his “prison” Epistles: Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, and the one we are now studying, Ephesians.

The letter to the Ephesians deals with no particular problem, doctrinal or social. It celebrates the joy of fellowship, relationship, and unity in Christ. It’s also a great expression of thanksgiving and praise for what God has done through Christ in the creation of His church.

The Week at a Glance: Why was Paul so confident of his calling? What is an apostle? What is a saint? When the Bible talks about “peace,” what does it mean? What does Paul mean by the phrase “in Christ”?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 8.*

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?

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?

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 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?

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?

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.*

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?

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.

The Missing Exams

by J. H. ZACHARY

As many as 700 Adventist students study at the state university in Butari, Rwanda. The Adventist church in the area is too far away and too small for the students to attend. So the Adventist students worship in the university's stadium on Sabbath morning.

Adventists are well known in Rwanda, and most of the professors at the university accommodate Adventist students when giving their exams. But occasionally visiting professors from other French-speaking countries are not so generous.

Nyira and Irene were seniors at the university. One of their required courses was being taught by a visiting professor. As exam time neared, the students studied fiercely, for their grade depended entirely on the final exam. But when the exam schedule was posted, the exam for this course fell on Sabbath. The girls went to see the professor and asked to take the exam on a different day.

"No," the professor answered abruptly. "You must take the examination with the other students."

The girls prayed for two days, and then they returned to request a change in their exam date again. This time the professor was even more harsh than the first time. Friendly students who knew their dilemma counseled them. "Surely your God will understand. You ought to take the exam."

But the girls refused. "Even if we must take the entire class again, we will not dishonor God's Sabbath." Early on Sabbath morning, the girls slipped out of the dormitory and into the forest nearby to pray. They returned to the school stadium in time for Sabbath School.

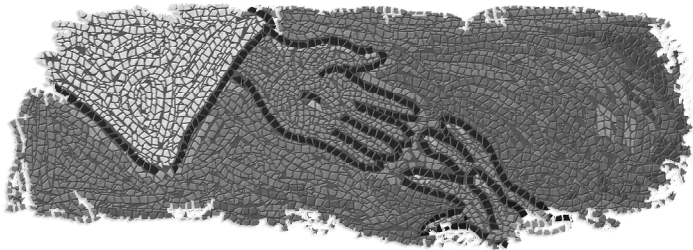
After church ended, Nyira and Irene walked back to their dormitory. On the way they met some of their classmates, returning from the examination hall. "Your God surely does love you," they said. "The examination has been rescheduled."

The girls listened, amazed, as they learned that the other students waited from 8:00 until 10:00, but their professor never came. Finally a teacher appeared and told the students that they could not find the examinations, and the exam would have to be rescheduled.

Nyira and Irene rejoiced that God had overruled the stubborn professor and showed a classroom of students that He does care for His children.

Until his death, J. H. ZACHARY coordinated outreach among the Jews and Muslims in the North American Division.

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 (*vs. 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.

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?

Redemption in Christ *(Eph. 1:7, 8)*

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

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 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?

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.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1000.

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?

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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.

A Mother's Prayer

by MARTA DE JESUS SANCHEZ DE GODOY

Armando had been a challenging child. He started taking drugs when he was 12 years old, and he joined a gang at 16. His mother, Marta, begged God to change him. One day, Armando announced that he was going to join the military.

Several months later, Armando returned home on leave. "Mother," he said, "I am a changed person. I met some Christians, and we are studying the Bible together."

Marta began to cry. She was glad that her son was changing, but she worried that these people would take her son away from the church to which the family belonged.

When she stated her concerns, Armando told her, "Mother, during our Bible studies I realized that what our church believes is wrong. Many things our church teaches are not in the Bible." Armando explained that he was studying the Bible with some Adventists, sincere and good people who take their beliefs from the Bible alone. Reluctantly Marta agreed that God was answering her prayer and leading her son.

One day Armando announced that he had found the Adventist church in town. "Mother," he said, "come with me to church." She went with her son, and from that day Armando and his mother worshiped together.

Marta cannot read, so Armando read the Bible to her, explaining difficult texts as they went. Marta absorbed the new truths and memorized many Bible texts. Armando and his mother were baptized together a few months later.

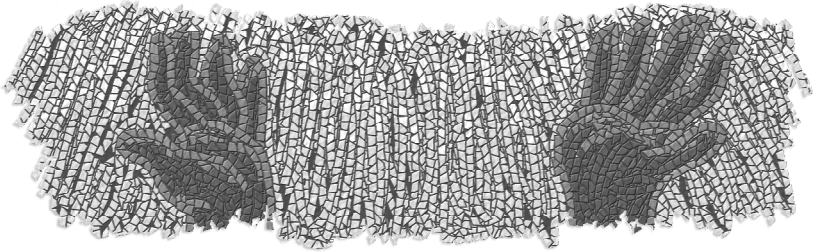
Because she was illiterate, Marta was timid about talking to others about her faith. God removed her fear, and she began sharing her faith with her neighbors. She has led 13 of her neighbors to the Lord and shares her faith with people in jail and in the hospital.

At first Marta's husband was not interested in her new faith. But she sometimes asked him to read the Bible to her, and soon she noticed that he was reading the Bible for himself. As he saw the changes in his wife and son, he was more willing to let them attend this strange new church.

Marta is surprised at how God changes people by His Spirit. "God has given me blessings I could never have imagined," she says with a smile. "He has given me better health than I have had in years. But the biggest blessing is the change He brought about in Armando."

MARTA DE JESUS SANCHEZ DE GODOY lives in Honduras, where she sells tamales and shares her faith.

Praise *and* Prayer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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?

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*).

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?

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?

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"?

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:

- ❶ 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.
- ❷ 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.
- ❸ 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 Extra Day of School

by JULIA KOSINKOVA

Julia Kosinkova is an elementary school teacher in Bulgaria. At the end of the school year, the principal told the teachers that the schools had to make up two days of classes. However, instead of extending the school year two days, the authorities had decided to hold classes on two Saturdays.

Julia immediately applied to the principal to be absent on these two days. The first Saturday was designated as a sports day, so the principal gave her permission to have the day off. However, the second Saturday he could not excuse. It would be the last day of classes, and in Bulgaria, teachers give their students their final grades this day. Children usually bring the teacher gifts, and the day becomes more like a celebration. When Julia asked to be absent on this day, the principal said No. "If you insist on having the day off," he said, "I will be forced to fire you."

Julia did not want to lose her job, but she told the principal that she would not be present on Saturday, even if she lost her job. Then she went home and prayed about the situation.

A few days later the principal summoned Julia to his office. Once more he asked her to come to school on the last day. "It is such a big day for the children and the school," he said, "and you know that only the children's official teacher can give the students their record books." Still Julia refused, saying that Saturday was not a holiday or just a day off for her; it was her Sabbath.

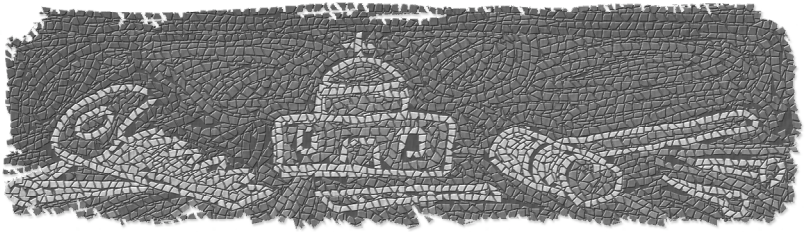
The principal asked Julia to send her pastor to see him. When the pastor arrived, the principal asked if he could give Julia special permission to miss one day in church so that she would not be fired from her job. "I cannot do that," the pastor explained. "God commands His children to keep the Sabbath day holy, and no human—not a pastor, priest, or judge—can give permission to break God's law."

The principal thanked the pastor and asked him for a book to read that would help him understand Julia's faith.

A few days later the principal called Julia into his office. "I think I have found a solution for our problem," he said, smiling. "I will ask your students to come to class on Sunday instead of Saturday. Since the children were planning to go on a field trip this day anyway, they can combine the trip with the school closing ceremonies." Julia thanked the principal and made arrangements with the children. In her heart she knew that God had worked a miracle on her behalf.

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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.

“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].”

“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 “quickenened 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?

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?

“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.”

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 That Would Not Burn

by ERIGA VICTOR

Southern Sudan has been a battleground for almost 40 years. Guerrilla soldiers repeatedly invade villages, burn homes, rape women, and terrorize the people. Families have been separated, and thousands have been killed.

In the village of Loa stands the first Adventist church built in southern Sudan. Members continued to worship there even after other villagers had fled. But the men of the congregation refused to join the army or to bear arms. Some soldiers thought that the Adventists refused to join their army because they supported the guerrilla troops from the north. Others were jealous that Adventists were not forced to join the army.

One day some soldiers decided to burn down the Adventist church, hoping to force the Adventists to join the military. At night they lit match after match and tossed them onto the dry thatched roof. But the roof would not catch fire. Finally one man said, "This is wrong, or we would have been able to burn this church down with one match." Others disagreed, and fighting broke out among the troublemakers.

Next the troops decided to force the Adventist men into the military. On Sabbath, they surrounded the church and waited for the service to end. When the congregation came outside, the soldiers rounded up the men and marched them to their camp amid shouts of triumph.

The Adventist men were taken to the base commander, who interviewed them one by one. The men each explained that they had been taken by force. The commander released all those who performed important community duties, such as teachers.

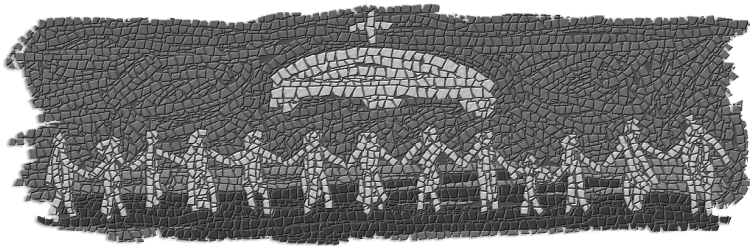
When the soldiers who had captured the Adventists saw that they were released, they threatened to go home too. The commander told them to think carefully about their actions. "We have been in several dangerous situations lately, but God has protected us. Perhaps it is because of the prayers of these Adventists that we have been saved. If you mistreat these people because of their faith, you may find yourself fighting against God. And remember, the day that these Adventists flee their village, God's protection may leave as well."

Three months later fighting in the area grew worse. When the Adventists started to leave, other villagers left as well, for they believed that the safest place to be was with God's people.

Pray that the fighting in Southern Sudan will end, and God's people will be able to return to their homes and farms.

ERIGA VICTOR is a teacher in Adjumani, a Sudanese settlement in northern Uganda.

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 eliminate hostility between differing groups in your community?

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?

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?

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?

“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?

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?

Hungry for God's Love

by J. H. ZACHARY

Dina Rosa grew up in a Jewish home. She studied Hebrew and attended Sabbath services. When she married, she was determined to bring up her children in the Jewish faith.

When the family moved to Florida, Dina took her children to the local synagogue. But after the service, one of the synagogue leaders told Dina that her children were too young to sit quietly, and their noise disturbed the service. This troubled Dina, who wanted her children to love their faith. Dina began worshiping with her children at home on Sabbath.

One day a friend showed Dina an invitation she had received to visit the Adventist Messianic Center in town. Dina had never heard of Adventists and was not sure what a Messianic Center was, but the center was close to her home, so she decided to visit it. She and her children went, and they were warmly welcomed.

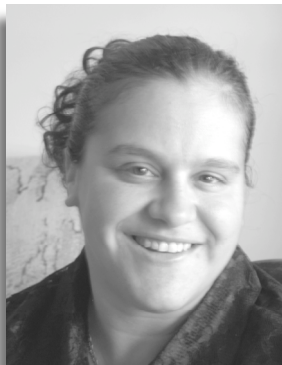
"Everyone was so friendly," Dina said. "I enjoyed the Hebrew songs, and I felt the people were honestly glad I was there."

Dina was impressed with the message that Rabbi Jeff Zaremsky presented from the Torah. The rabbi's clear teaching awakened in Dina a desire to learn more about the Scriptures, and soon Dina joined a Bible-study class. "I was shown clearly from the Bible that Yeshua [Jesus] is the Messiah that was promised by God in the Torah. It is right there in the Scriptures," she said. Dina was baptized into the Beth-El Shalom congregation of Seventh-day Adventists.

"I thank God that I now know Yeshua as my Savior," Dina says. "My faith in God has helped me through some tough times."

Dina leads the center's Pathfinder club and is developing a Pathfinder honor that focuses on Jewish heritage.

Today at least thirteen Adventist Jewish congregations in North America reach out to Jewish neighbors. Pray that God's children will hear His call to come to know the Messiah through this ministry.



DINA ROSA (left). Until his death, J. H. ZACHARY coordinated outreach among the Jews and Muslims in the North American Division.

AD



Give them room to grow

After years of brutal genocide in Cambodia, the Adventist church is starting to grow. In 1990, there were no Adventists; today there are more than 5,000. These new believers need support and nurture.

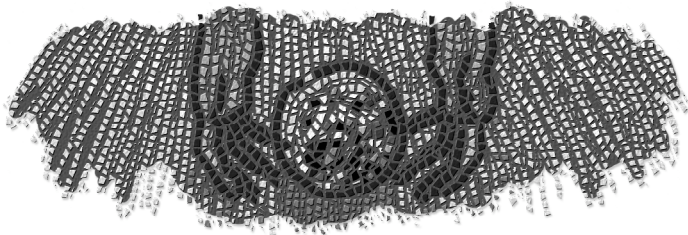
The Adventist church in Cambodia is operating a school in the capital, Phnom Penh, with 340 students. It's located in a house. A single house. Let's give them space to grow.

Part of your Mission Offering this quarter will help make this dream a reality.

MISSION

Your Mission Offering supports life-changing projects around the world. Visit www.adventistmission.org for more information, and to give your Mission Offering online. The Thirteen Sabbath Offering on December 31 supports projects in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

God's Mystery: The Universal Fellowship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 10:5, John 4:9, Acts 10:26-28, Ephesians 3.*

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?

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?

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?

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?

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.

“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.

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?

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?

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?

The Carpenter Who Died for Us

by DOROTHY EATON WATTS

Four carpenters sat on the floor of their small shop in a village in eastern India. As they planed and sanded the wood and fit the pieces together to make beds, tables, and stools, they talked about the man who had come to visit them. He was educated yet he took time to talk with common people and become their friend. The carpenters liked Mathew Reddy, but he was a Christian. They had heard bad things about Christians, but this man seemed so different.

One day when Reddy visited the carpenters' shop, he asked them, "Did you know that the God I worship lived on this earth and worked as a carpenter?"

The men laid down their tools and stared at Reddy. "A God who was a carpenter?" they asked, astonished. "Tell us more about Him."

"Jesus, the Son of God, came to live on this earth to show us what God is like," Reddy said. "He chose to be born as a human, to live in the home of a lowly carpenter, and to work with His hands, just like you do."

"We want to hear more about this carpenter God," the men said. Reddy came often to study the Bible with the carpenters. He explained why Jesus came to earth, how He ministered to others, and how He died to save them from their sins. Eventually the carpenters accepted Jesus as their Lord and invited Reddy to study the Bible with their families. In time 15 members of their families also accepted Jesus as their Lord.

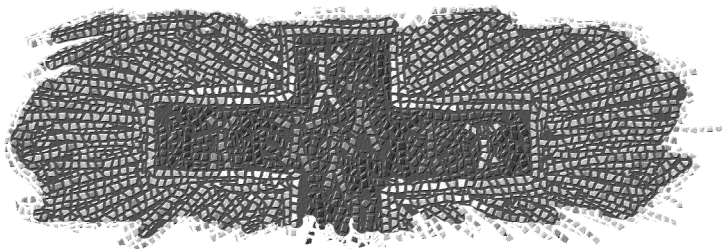
When news of the men's conversions spread through the village, trouble began. People stopped buying furniture from the men; they refused to allow their wives draw water from the village well; shopkeepers refused to sell them rice. Still the carpenters worshiped Jesus. Then some villagers sent their cattle to trample the families' vegetable gardens, destroying their meager crops.

When Adventist leaders learned of the persecution, they provided relief supplies to help keep the families alive and encouraged the men to take their case to the district counselor. The counselor defended the carpenters' right to worship God as they chose and sent police to bring order to the village and assure that the new Christians could worship freely.

Problems still arise from time to time, but the carpenters remain steadfast. "People can do anything they like to us," they insist, "but we will be faithful to the Carpenter who died for us."

DOROTHY EATON WATTS is associate secretary of the Southern Asia Division.

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?

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?

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?”

Unity: Equipped for the Ministry *(Eph. 4:12, 13)*

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?

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.

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 over-emphasizing 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?

“Go In and Listen!”

by MARK SOLOMON

“Go in! Go in and listen!” a voice urged young Nolty Swartbooi. *Who’s talking to me?* he wondered as he walked past the Adventist church on his way to town in Upington, South Africa.

Nolty’s family were Christians. Once in their family devotions they encountered the Sabbath commandment, but their pastor told them that the Sabbath was no longer binding on Christians.

Then Nolty found a *Voice of Prophecy* correspondence course enrollment card and signed up for the lessons. Again he encountered the Sabbath question; again his pastor dismissed it.

As Nolty walked past the church, the congregation’s enthusiastic singing caught his attention. Nolty entered the little Adventist church and was greeted warmly. The church, he learned, was holding evangelistic meetings.

As he listened to the speaker, the message sounded familiar. *This is what I read in the Bible lessons!* he thought. Nolty returned every evening, and there he found answers to the questions that troubled him. Before the evangelistic meetings ended, Nolty was convinced that he had found God’s true church, and he must be a part of it.

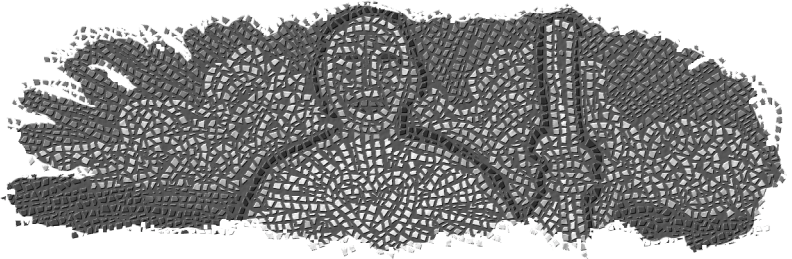
But when Nolty told his father about his discovery, his father became angry. “That church is a sect!” his father roared. “Don’t go there again!” But Nolty was convinced that God had spoken to him. On Sabbath, Nolty asked the members to pray for him. He was willing to give up everything to worship God on His holy day. When he arrived home that afternoon, his father again warned him that if he continued disobeying him, he would have to leave home.

Nolty went to his room and prayed for wisdom and for strength to do what God commanded. Then he went to talk to his father. “Father,” he said, “you taught me to follow God’s commandments, and I have.” Then Nolty opened his Bible and read verse after verse relating to the Sabbath. His father listened in shocked silence to his son’s careful explanation. When Nolty finished the Bible study, he told his father, “I want do to what the Bible tells me. What do you think?” His father could not object; a month later Nolty was baptized.

Life is not easy in the region of South Africa where Nolty lives. Jobs are few, and hope is hard to come by. Alcoholism, HIV, and AIDS are rampant. Nolty would like to continue his education and become a pastor so he can work with youth, showing them that the hope they need is found only in Jesus.

MARK SOLOMON is a pastor in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa.

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 *(Eph. 4:17-22)*

A life “worthy of the calling” (*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” (*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” (*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” (*Rom. 6:6, NKJV*).

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?

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 (*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” (*Eph. 4:19, NKJV; see also Rom. 1:26-32*).

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.”

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?

“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 conformed 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?

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?

“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 _____

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?

“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?

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.

- _____
- _____
- _____

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?

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.

The Missing Sign

by ELIAS RAIMBUSE

I am a police officer in Papua New Guinea. A few years ago I was transferred to a town in the southern highlands of Papua New Guinea to command a new unit. I went to look over the territory where I would work. It was lovely, but something was missing: I could not find an Adventist church. I searched the city and the countryside, but I did not see the familiar three angels logo that identifies the Adventist church. I wondered if I should accept the assignment to move here if there was no church for my family to attend.

When I told my family that I could not find a church, we decided to pray about it for a week. God showed us that He wanted us to move to the new territory. We packed our things and made the ten-hour trip to our new home. The family enjoyed the beauty of the area and quickly settled into our new home. With no church nearby, we worshiped on our veranda.

One day a man came to repair a leak in our roof. When he finished, he asked my wife, "Are you Adventist?" Surprised, she told him yes, we are Adventists. The man smiled broadly. "I am an Adventist too. But we do not have a church in town, so I worship at home." Later when we talked, the man told me about a teacher at a nearby school who also was Adventist. We met together and decided to hold our worships in a classroom at the school. Later we learned about a former police officer who lived not far who also was a believer, and we invited him to join our group.

One day I asked the police officer if we could get some land on which to build a church.

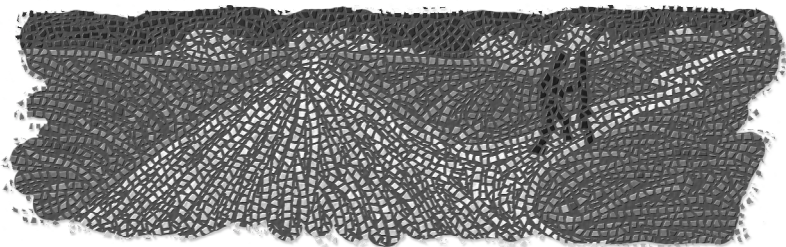
"I have a piece of land!" he said. "I will give it to the church if you build a chapel on it!" We went to see the land, which was located on the main road. It was perfect! We cut down the undergrowth to mark the boundary of the land for a church, then we registered the land and our congregation with the local mission.

Before we began to build the chapel, I erected a sign with the familiar three angels logo on it. I wanted everyone to know that this land and the church that would one day stand there belonged to the Seventh-day Adventists.

We now have a small chapel on the land, and the congregation is growing nicely as word spreads that Adventists have entered the town. I am glad that God used simple people—a police officer, a repairman, and a teacher—to form a new congregation in a remote area of Papua New Guinea. He can use you, too, wherever you live.

ELIAS RAIMBUSE is a sergeant in the Papua New Guinea police force.

The Christian Walk



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.

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?

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?

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*.

Have you ever known anyone whose lifestyle, demeanor, and character acted as light that reprovved 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*.

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?

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.

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"?

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?

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?

A Sacrifice of Love

by SETRA RATSIMBA

Setra is a teenager living in Madagascar. When he was little, his father took him and his five brothers and sisters to church every Sabbath. Setra's mother was not an Adventist. When Setra was seven, his father died, and no one took the children to church. The family struggled to survive on the little money his mother could earn sewing for the neighbors.

A few years later Setra's neighbors invited the children to attend Sabbath School again. Once more Setra and his brothers and sisters walked one hour to Sabbath School on Sabbath. When he was old enough, Setra joined the baptismal class and was baptized. One by one his siblings stopped attending the church, leaving Setra to worship alone.

On Sabbath everyone got up early. Setra went to Sabbath School, and his brothers and sisters went to the fields to work. Often he remained at the church until sundown so he could attend all the meetings and not be under the influence of secular music or talking.

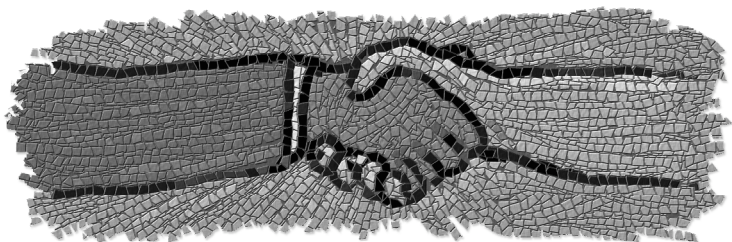
On Sunday while the other members of the family rested, Setra gathered wood to sell in the marketplace. Then, because his mother was getting too old to work, Setra washed the family's clothes at the river. Sometimes he was tempted to grumble that he had to do women's work, but he decided to make scrubbing his family's clothes his sacrifice of love. Alone at the riverside, Setra sang praises to God as he dipped the clothes into the river, sprinkled soap powder on them, then scrubbed them by hand. He prayed as he rinsed each piece and wrung it dry. Then he sang as he carried the laundry home and laid it on the grass to dry.

Setra does not mind working on Sunday. He is grateful that his brothers and sisters allow him to worship God on Sabbath. Setra asks that the worldwide church pray that he will remain faithful in Jesus and that his family will turn their lives over to God.



SETRA RATSIMBA is 18 years old. He lives in a small town near Antananarivo, Madagascar.

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 vender 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.

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?

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?

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?

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 (*vs. 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?

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:

- ❶ **Supposing you are made aware that one of your church members is involved in spousal abuse; how should the church handle the issue?**
- ❷ **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?**
- ❸ **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?**

“Bless My Son”

by KAREN GLASSFORD

“Please madam, bless my son,” the man pleaded.

I was a member of an evangelistic team that had traveled to India to teach people about the only true God, to wrest them from their fear and darkness and bring them to the light of Christ.

“What is wrong with your son?” I asked the man.

“Hand not work, long time,” he said, holding up his son’s stiff arm. The thin fingers had curled into a tight ball and refused to move.

I burrowed my finger inside his fist and asked, “Can you squeeze my hand?” His sad brown eyes looked at me as he tried to move his fingers. But he could not move them. He wanted me to know that he understood my request, so he grabbed my hand with his good hand and squeezed hard.

“Oh Lord,” I prayed, “I do not know what this man and his son know about You, but they have come asking for Your healing touch. This boy cannot play as other boys do, and when he is grown it will be hard for him to earn a living unless he can use both of his hands. Please Lord, if it is Your will, heal this little boy and fill him with your love. . . .”

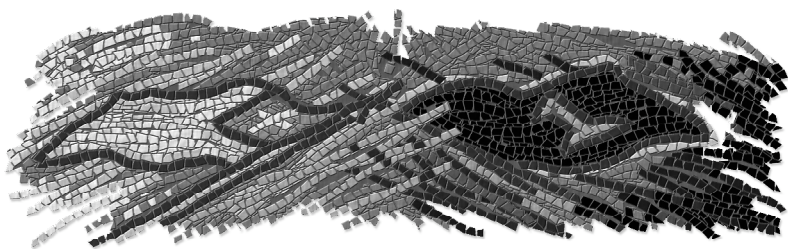
A gasp startled my eyes open, and I stared at the boy. His face glowed with wonder and amazement as he watched his fingers relax from their tight fist. Slowly he wriggled his stiff little fingers, then he moved his wrist, which also had been stiff just moments before. A smile streaked across the boy’s face, and his eyes shone with joy.

I squeaked out an emotional “amen,” too moved to say anymore. I had just watched the God of the universe step down into a tiny rice field outside a little Indian village and take note of a little boy’s need.

Night after night during the meetings, people came to hear the message of God’s love. Some, like this little boy, came for healing. Hope struggled against fear as they made decisions to give up their idols and cling to Jesus instead. Joy filled their eyes as they realized that this Jesus truly is the God who made heaven, earth, and them. With new hope and a new purpose in their hearts, they are starting their journey to heaven and an eternity worth looking forward to.

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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?

“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

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?

“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*).

“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?

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:

- ❶ As a class, read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and discuss what insights you find on spiritual warfare.
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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 Reluctant Carpenter

by HECTOR GALLARDO

Hector Gallardo wanted a better life than he could find in his homeland, Chile. So he traveled to Argentina to find work. He was a carpenter by trade, but he wanted something better. He worked hard and started his own business. For eight years life was good, and he did not think about God. Then he was accused of a crime he did not commit and was sent to prison. He spent two years in prison, far from his home and family.

In prison Hector had time to think. He remembered a dream he had as a youth in which Jesus was angry with him. In another dream bad things happened to him. Hector decided that his dreams were coming true. He wondered if Jesus really was angry with him.

One day a fellow prisoner gave him a Bible, and Hector began reading it. He could not understand many things he read, but he doggedly kept on reading. He fasted and prayed as he read the Bible. After one long fast he felt weak, but other prisoners said that his face was shining, and they were afraid of him.

Another prisoner gave him a copy of *The Great Controversy*. He began reading it and found that it contained many new ideas. He compared the book's claims with the Bible and found them to be true.

At last Hector was released from prison. He took his Bible and *The Great Controversy* with him. He wanted to find the people who published the book, a group called Seventh-day Adventists. After searching for several days, he found a small group of Adventist believers. He stayed near the church and worshiped with them, studying the Bible with them, learning more about his new faith. After four months, the group of believers asked Hector to be their leader. But he told them he was not yet baptized. They urged him to prepare for baptism.

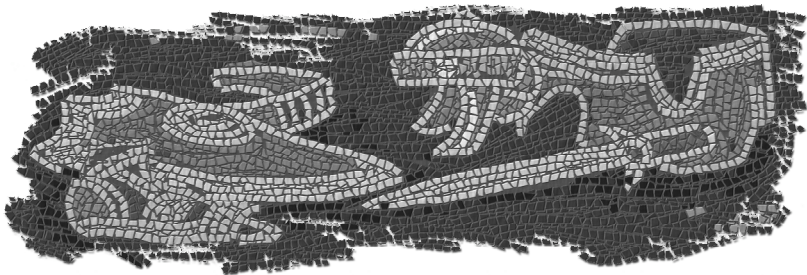
Shortly after his baptism, the same voice that had spoken to him in prison told him to return to Chile and share his faith with his family. Reluctantly he packed his few possessions and returned home.

His family welcomed him home, but when he told them that he had become an Adventist, they laughed at him and said he was crazy. It took seven years for his parents and sister to accept God's message and join the Adventist church.

Hector once more works as a carpenter, sharing his faith with those who come to his carpenter shop in Chile. He is satisfied to spend his life where God wants him, even if he never becomes rich.

HECTOR GALLARDO serves as a local elder in his home church in La Union, Chile.

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?”

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—some-what 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?

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. If 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?

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?

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?

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.”

Maria's Celebration of Joy

by J. H. ZACHARY

Maria Brozozek was a retired tailor from Poland. She wanted to do something to help people in her hometown. One day she learned that a poor family there could not pay their rent, and the apartment owner was planning to evict them.

Maria appealed to the community to donate used items that she could sell to help pay the family's rent.

With this action, Maria's life took a change she could not have predicted. She found other people that needed help. She decided to plan a special day for her community that she called the Celebration of Joy. She planned a number of activities for people to enjoy and asked the community to come and bring used items to donate. After the children performed a play based on a Bible story, Maria held an auction to sell the donated items. The proceeds of the auction were set aside to help the poor within the community.

On another occasion Maria arranged an art exhibition and invited a local artist to provide several pieces of art to sell. Half of the proceeds were given for the poor. On other occasions actors performed in a benefit show to help the city's poor.

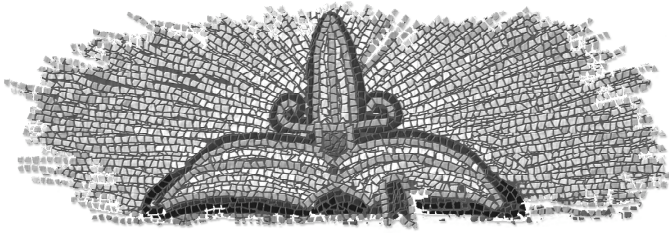
When people ask Maria why she is doing this, she tells them that Jesus went about helping the poor and the sick, and God has asked her to do the same. Radio and television stations in town featured Maria's Celebration of Joy, and the city newspaper now runs a column listing the needs of people and sources for help. People have become more aware of the needs of poor children, and provide clothes for them. Disadvantaged children are taken on excursions and field trips to make their lives richer and more joyful.

Because of Maria's compassion for the poor, the attitude of the people in that city toward the Adventist church has changed. A local priest has encouraged his congregation to support the Celebration of Joy and invited Adventists to present a musical concert in their church to benefit the poor. Many people have shown an interest in knowing more about the teachings of the Adventist Church, and Maria is studying the Bible with ten people as a result of her work.

Maria never dreamed that the needs of one poor family would bring so much joy to her city or so many people to a better knowledge of God's love.

MARIA BROZOZEK shares God's love in Legionowo, Poland. Until his death, J. H. ZACHARY coordinated outreach among the Jews and Muslims in the North American Division.

The Christian Communion and Conduct



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 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?

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.

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?

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.

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?

Discovering a “New” Church

by EDNA RODICH

When Edna Rodich started high school in western Kenya, she made friends with some Adventist students who invited her to their worship meetings. Impressed by what Adventists teach and how they study the Bible, she began to study the Bible with them. She was excited to discover the Sabbath truth and memorized several Bible texts to support it. Before long she was convinced that Adventists truly follow God’s teachings.

Edna visited her family one weekend and told her mother what she had learned. Mother surprised Edna by telling her, “You must not tell your father that you are attending Adventist meetings. I once attended the Adventist church too, but when I married your father, he forbade me to attend.” Whenever Edna returned home from school, she secretly attended Sabbath services, then attended church with her parents on Sunday.

Edna’s father eventually learned that Edna was attending the Adventist church; he told her she must stop going. Edna showed her father the Bible texts that support the Sabbath, but he threw the Bible away, saying “never talk to me about this again.”

In time Edna’s father softened and was willing to talk to her about what she believed. Mother rejoiced that her husband’s heart was softening toward the church of her childhood.

Edna invited her parents to attend Pathfinder Sabbath at church. Her father was impressed with how well behaved the Pathfinders were and how well they knew their Bible. After church that day her father praised her for her accomplishments and told her that she could become an Adventist if she wished. Then to her surprise, he offered to let her attend the Adventist high school.

Because of Edna’s faith and determination, her mother has returned to the church she loved. Edna’s brother has joined the Adventist Church, and her father shows signs of the Holy Spirit’s influence in his life.

“I am happy to be a part of this church that teaches the truth of the Bible, not traditions,” Edna says. “I want to be a literature evangelist and help other people find God, as I did.”



EDNA RODICH is studying at the Adventist secondary school in Baraton, western Kenya.

Nowhere is our relationship with others more important, more fraught with both temporal and eternal consequences, than in the family. Through family relationships God wants to show His love to the world. This quarter's study, *Families in the Family of God*, by Ron Flowers, has been written in the sad recognition that for many, this haven doesn't exist as it should. Our goal, if nothing else, is through study of the Word to help homes and families be what God would have them to be.

Lesson 1: A Family of Families

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Family Roots (*Gen. 2:18-25*)

MONDAY: Jesus' Affirmation of Families (*Matt. 19:4-6*)

TUESDAY: A Variety of Families (*Gen. 27:1-28:5, Ruth 1:22, 2:23*)

WEDNESDAY: One Is a Whole Number (*1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 2:11*)

THURSDAY: Household of Households (*John 20:17, Acts 9:17*)

Memory Text: *Ephesians 2:19, 20, NKJV.*

Sabbath Gem: Through our family, both in our households and in His church, God longs for us to experience His self-giving love.

Lesson 2: God's Word on Family Living

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Family Commandments (*Exod. 20:12*)

MONDAY: Family Narratives (*Ruth 1, 2*)

TUESDAY: Principles of Relationships (*Prov. 12:25*)

WEDNESDAY: The Royal Love Poem (*Song of Sol. 1:9, 14, 16; 2:3*)

THURSDAY: The Divine Parent and Marriage Partner (*Isa. 54:5*)

Memory Text: *Romans 15:4, NIV.*

Sabbath Gem: Within the pages of His Word, God has unfolded His plans and purposes for families.

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