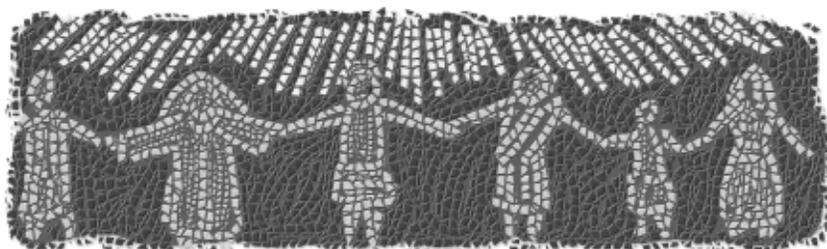


Ephesians: Themes in Relationships¹



SABBATH—OCTOBER 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Isaiah 14:12; Acts 26:9-19; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:11-17; Ephesians 3:11, 12; Colossians 1:20, 21; Revelation 12:7.

MEMORY VERSE: “Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ” (Ephesians 1:3, NlrV).

A LETTER OF CELEBRATION. Last week, we saw that Paul's third missionary journey was coming to a close. Soon he would be on his way to Jerusalem. He told the Ephesians they would not see him again (Acts 20:25). He was right. Paul was soon arrested in Jerusalem. Then he was imprisoned in Rome. Shut in Caesar's prison, Paul looked back on his life as the apostle to the Gentiles² (Ephesians 3:8).

Alone in prison, Paul celebrated the amazing fellowship in Jesus by writing his prison Epistles (Letters): Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians. This quarter, we are studying Ephesians.

Ephesians does not deal with any special problem. It celebrates the joy of fellowship, relationship, and unity in Christ. It is also a good example of thanksgiving and praise for what God had done through Christ in creating His church.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Why was Paul so confident (sure) of his call to do God's work? What is an apostle? What is a saint? What does the Bible mean when it talks about peace? What does Paul mean by the words “in Christ”?

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

¹relationships—the connections we have with other people.

²Gentiles—people who are not Jews.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 2

Acts 26:9-19 _____

**THE AUTHOR: PAUL
(Galatians 1:11-17).**

Read Ephesians 1:1. When Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians, he speaks of himself as an apostle. In the kind of Greek language Paul used, the word “apostle” suggests an ambassador³ or a messenger. These are good words to describe Paul’s life and ministry.⁴ He really had a message to deliver. He was an ambassador for Christ.

In the Gospels,⁵ the word “apostle” is used for the twelve men Jesus called and sent out (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16). Paul was not part of these twelve people, but he uses the word for himself in Ephesians and in many other places because he was sure of his call to do God’s work.

How and why does Paul defend his title as an apostle?

Galatians 1:1 _____

Galatians 1:11-17 _____

1 Corinthians 9:1, 2 _____

Paul never had any doubt about his call as an apostle. Paul’s experience with Jesus while on the road to Damascus had a deep influence on him. It is in that meeting with Jesus that Paul received his call to be a special messenger to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Acts 22:21). From that time on, Paul was not his own boss. He belonged to Jesus. It was God’s will that Paul be an apostle, an ambassador, a messenger of Jesus. Paul accepted the call with all his heart. His life was never the same after he met Jesus. The church and the world were changed too, because Paul became an apostle.



God wanted Paul to tell the world about Jesus.

³ambassador—person who represents a nation or government. Paul represented the kingdom of Christ.

⁴ministry—work for God.

⁵Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

Paul had a great conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Not many people God calls have such an experience. 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?

MONDAY—OCTOBER 3

THE RECIPIENTS:⁶ THE SAINTS IN EPHESUS (Revelation 14:12).

Paul wrote Ephesians "to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1, NKJV). Almost all of the early church accepted that Ephesians was written to the church at Ephesus. But some important historic manuscripts do not have the words "in Ephesus" in Ephesians 1:1. So was Ephesians written directly to Ephesians or to other churches, too? Most Bible experts believe Ephesians was addressed to Ephesus as a letter to be shared with other churches in Asia. That explains why Paul did not write about persons or problems in the Ephesian church. Instead, he celebrated Christ's work. He showed God's work in heavenly places, Christ's work on the cross, and the church's war against "the rulers, the authorities⁷ and the powers of this dark world" (Ephesians 6:12, NIV).

Paul often uses the word "saints" in his letters. The New Testament uses the word "saints" 61 times. Thirty-nine of those times are in Paul's letters. What does each of the verses below teach us about the meaning of the word "saints"? (The King James Version or the New King James Version uses the word "saints" in these verses. Many other versions do not use the word "saints" in these verses. But the verses in these other versions also will help you understand what the word "saints" means.)

Revelation 14:12 _____

1 Corinthians 1:2 _____

Ephesians 4:12 _____

Ephesians 5:3 _____

Colossians 1:26 _____

The word "saints" does not mean a Christian of perfect and holy charac-

⁶recipients—people who receive something; the people in the Ephesian church received Paul's letter to them.

⁷authorities—people who are in charge of governments.

ter, but the word “saints” means *all* believers. It means set apart. Saints are people set apart in Christ to be faithful in Him. People commonly believe that saints are sinless and perfect. But that is not how the New Testament uses the word “saints.” Saints are to “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). But being a saint means being faithful to Jesus, not perfection in righteousness (holiness). Saints are sinners saved by God’s grace.

The saints in Ephesus are in Christ. All people who have accepted Christ are in this world and in the world to come (eternity).⁸

“A little girl was attending worship in a church with many stained-glass windows. Someone asked her who saints were. ‘Saints are people the light shines through,’ she answered. Saints are people who point to Jesus in their life, speech, actions, attitudes,⁹ and relationships.”—Adapted from *Life Application Bible Commentary: Ephesians* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996), p. 4. How well has your life pointed to Jesus? If you could do something over, what would it be?



Is the light of Jesus shining through you?

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 4

**GRACE AND PEACE
(Ephesians 1:2).**

Paul used “grace . . . and peace” as part of his usual greeting in most of his letters (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3;

⁸eternity—life without end; forever.

⁹attitudes—how you think and feel about something.

Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; et cetera). The word for grace used in these verses is different from the common Greek way of greeting. The Greek greeting suggests a wish for health and success. Instead of greeting his readers with a call for health and good wishes, Paul used a word for grace that was beginning to have a new meaning in the Christian faith. This new meaning shows God's unearned favor toward sinners. It is only through God's own action and love that anyone can be saved: "God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't [does not] come from anything you do. It is God's gift" (Ephesians 2:8, NIV).

In addition to grace, Paul wished for his readers peace.

The death and resurrection¹⁰ of Christ brought new meaning to the idea of peace. Christ's death and resurrection opened doors of new experience and relationship between humans and God, and between humans themselves. How do you understand the idea of peace shown in John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14, 15; Ephesians 6:15?

Both grace and peace come from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:2, NKJV). Ephesians 1:2 shows that Christ and the Father are equal. This means

Jesus is God. Without Jesus, God's grace could not have been made clear to people. Without Jesus, peace between God and sinners could not have been possible. So, the goal of Ephesians is to show what God had done in Christ. Christ is our salvation. We are saved because of His grace. He is our peace. He is the basis of our new relationship with God.

How have you experienced God's peace? How is God's peace different from the world's peace? What do you need to do to better know and experience God's peace?

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 5

**THE THEME: UNITY
(Ephesians 1:9, 10).**

What is the theme in Ephesians 1:9, 10? Whom does God plan to join together? How does your understanding of the great controversy¹¹ help you understand the need for this unity? Also read Revelation 12:7; Isaiah 14:12; Colossians 1:20, 21.

In Ephesians 1:9, 10, Paul sets forth unity as the theme of his letter. "He was writing to a church full of different people: Jews and Gentiles,¹² Asians and Europeans, slaves and

¹⁰resurrection—coming back to life after dying.

¹¹the great controversy—the war between Jesus and Satan over good and evil.

¹²Gentiles—people who were not Jews.

freemen. They were all symbols of a mixed-up world. This world would be brought back to unity in Christ. This includes unity of person, family, church, and . . . unity of God’s universe.”—Adapted from *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 995.

Paul’s idea of unity has two parts. The first part deals with the church. In the church, both Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in one group. The second part is universal.¹³ In this, all things in heaven and earth move toward full unity in Christ.

Full unity in Christ comes from the mind and will of God. All things depend on “what he [God] had planned through Christ” (Ephesians 1:9, NIV).

Paul tells the Ephesians that a small example of that full unity must be seen in the Christian church.

Why is unity in the church so important? What happens to unity when there is disagreement and quarreling? Who is hurt? How can you encourage unity in the church?

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 6

THE KEY: IN CHRIST (Ephesians 3:11, 12).

The words “in Christ” come up about two hundred times in Paul’s writ-

ings. In Ephesians, these words show how well Paul understood what God has done for us and the fallen universe. The words “in Christ,” “in Him,” and “in whom” come up more than thirty times in Ephesians. Many times, Paul uses these words to show that God’s eternal¹⁴ purposes (plans) in Creation, history, salvation, and restoration¹⁵ are worked out through Christ. He is the key to everything we have from God.

Paul recognizes the importance of Christ coming to earth as a man. Paul boldly says that without Christ, we would have no salvation, no adoption, no forgiveness of sin, no connection with God, no example of God’s love, no church, no restoration, and no future. In every way Ephesians is a Christ-centered letter. Ephesians is a hymn (religious song) to Christ. Without Christ, we would be “strangers” (Ephesians 2:12).

What has been done for us in Christ?

Colossians 1:13, 14 _____

Ephesians 3:11, 12 _____

Ephesians 1:7 _____

¹³universal—having to do with the universe.

¹⁴eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

¹⁵restoration—to make us once again in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27).

Ephesians 1:10, 11 _____

2 Corinthians 5:19 _____

Colossians 2:10 _____

Everything we have as Christians, we can find only in Christ. He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. That is why we owe Him everything. That is why He must come first in our lives. That is why we must surrender our wills to Him. That is why we cannot be excused for refusing to accept Him and what He has done for us. By refusing Him, we refuse life itself.



Christ is all-important and all-capable. So, He must have the most important place in our lives. He must be in the center of our homes, our work, our beliefs, and our worship. In Christ, God has made all things possible. Christ in us makes all things possible. What changes do you need to keep God the center of your life?

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: *Paul as an apostle:* “Paul was able to make clear his position as an apostle of Christ. He declared (announced) himself to be an apostle, ‘sent by Jesus Christ and by God the Father’ (Galatians 1:1, NIV). From the highest Authority (God) in heaven, not from men, Paul had received his command. And Paul’s position had been accepted by a general council at Jerusalem. Paul had always followed this council’s decisions while he worked among the Gentiles.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 387.

Unity: “Men are joined together, not by force or self-interest, but by love. When they are joined by love, they show the working of God’s influence that is above every human influence. Where there is unity, it is proof that the image of God is being restored in man. This shows that a new principle¹⁶ of life has been planted. This also

¹⁶principle—a general law that helps us to make specific laws. The new principle we receive when we accept Christ is the principle of love (1 Corinthians 13).

shows that God also gives us power to reject (refuse) evil powers, and that God's grace helps us keep the selfishness in the natural heart under control." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.

Christ's work: "Christ's saving work proves that the government of God is just and righteous (holy). The all-powerful God is made known as the God of love. Satan's charges are proven false. And his character is exposed. Rebellion can never come up again. Sin can never again enter the universe. Throughout eternity, all people are safe from backsliding. By love's (Jesus') self-sacrifice, the people of earth and the beings of heaven are connected with their Creator in bonds of inseparable union." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 26.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What can you say to someone who says, "I gave my heart to Christ. I have accepted His forgiving death for me. I try to obey Him to the best of my God-given ability. But I still feel no peace"?
2. What problems are dividing your local church? What can you do to help bring 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 part of being in Christ that means the most to him or her and explain why that part is so important.



Let the image of God be restored in you.