

## Sabbath School Lesson #1 – Paul and the Ephesians – 24-30 June 2023

**C**hrist would have us know the purpose of God. Paul says, “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Ephesians 1:9-10). When this purpose of gathering together is fulfilled, then will Christ have accomplished the purpose for which He ascended to heaven, namely, “that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:10). “And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). And then from “every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them,” will be heard with one voice, “Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13). It is God’s purpose to “gather together in one all things in Christ” and then to have all, including Christ, under God. He will finally put an end to divisions of every kind, and He does it now in those who accept Him. In Christ there are no distinctions of nationality, and no classes and ranks. No Christian thinks of any other man as English, French, Russian, Ukrainian, Indian, Chinese, or Ugandan, but simply as a man, and, therefore, a possible heir of God through Christ. If that other man, no matter what his race or nation, be also a Christian, then the bond becomes mutual, and, therefore, still stronger. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

**Sunday: Paul, Evangelist to Ephesus** – What was the work of Paul, as an evangelist, in Ephesus? “The hearts of Paul and his associate workers were drawn out in behalf of those who were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Through the untiring ministrations of the apostles to the Gentiles, the “strangers and foreigners,” who “sometimes were far off,” learned that they had been “made nigh by the blood of Christ,” and that through faith in His atoning sacrifice they might become “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Ephesians 2:12, 13, 19.” {AA 175.1}. “Advancing in faith, Paul labored unceasingly for the upbuilding of God’s kingdom among those who had been neglected by the teachers in Israel. Constantly he exalted Christ Jesus as “the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15), and exhorted the believers to be “rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith.” Colossians 2:7.” {AA 175.2}. To those who believe, Christ is a sure foundation. Upon this living stone, Jews and Gentiles alike may build. It is broad enough for all and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world. This is a fact plainly recognized by Paul himself. In the closing days of his ministry, when addressing a group of Gentile believers who had remained steadfast in their love of the gospel truth, the apostle wrote, “Ye ... are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” Ephesians 2:19, 20” {AA 175.3}.

**Monday: A Riot in the Amphitheater** – The Lesson writer poses a very good question: What do you think Paul would warn our church about today, and why? As Paul waited “at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” (Acts 17:16). At Ephesus, they worshipped idols in the “temple of the great goddess Diana,” and after Paul preached against these idols, saying that “they be no gods which are made with hands,” there erupted a riot, where Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen shouted for “the space of two hours,” saying “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (see Ephesians 21). Sadly, subtle unseen idolatry is practiced today in our Seventh-day Adventist Church. Worshipers do not have physical idols made by hands, but idols in their hearts. Remember that idolatry begins in the heart. Ezekiel says so in Ezekiel 14:3 “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” Idolatry begins in the heart, begins in the mind, and a false understanding or conception of God is idolatry. “Are we worshippers of Jehovah, or of Baal? Of the living God, or of idols?” {5T 173.3} “No outward shrines may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon, yet we may be practicing idolatry. It is as easy to make an

idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and his attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal. Are we worshipping the true God as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place?" {5T 173.4}. In the time of Ellen White and our leading pioneers, our Seventh-day Adventist Church was non-trinitarian, Ellen White died in 1915, our Church remained non-trinitarian until the trinity was made a Fundamental Belief in 1980. What Ellen White calls "philosophical idol" is the inexplicable trinity philosophy that was after the death of our leading pioneers enshrined in our Fundamental Beliefs. Should Paul come forth from his grave and visit our Seventh-day Adventist congregations, his spirit would again be stirred within him as "he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." He would not see the "temple of the great goddess Diana," but the church members as the human temples of the "trinity," "blessed trinity" – the "philosophical idol enshrined in" the hearts of professed people of God. Instead of hearing Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen shouting for "the space of two hours," "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," he would find the people reciting, "Trinity: There is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons." Instead of beholding the people prostrate before the shrine of the "goddess Diana," he would hear them pray to trinity gods, which are not God.

**Tuesday: Hearing the Letter to the Ephesians** – As you read through Ephesians, what key theme seems to come through in this letter? What does it say to you? What specific point or points touch home? Christ's inheritance. In Ephesians 1, Paul prays that we may be enlightened to "know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power to us-ward who believe" (verses 18-19). In the 10-11 verses we are told that it is in Christ that we obtain this inheritance; and in the second chapter (verses 4-10) we learn that we are made partakers of the inheritance in Christ because of the great love wherewith God loved us. Now read the sum of the whole matter in one of the most wonderful prayers ever uttered: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19).

**Wednesday: Ephesians in Its Time** – What happened to the Ephesians after all the work of Paul and what lesson is there for us today? "Paul's letter to the Ephesians outlines the privileges granted them by the Lord, and it shows how earnestly the apostle labored for them. But they left their first love. They ceased to depend on Christ as their Teacher, and as a result they became cold and indifferent" {18LtMs, Lt 125, 1903, par. 27}. "To those who today profess to believe the truth, the faithful and true Witness is bearing the message borne to the church at Ephesus: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." [Revelation 2:4, 5.]" {18LtMs, Lt 125, 1903, par. 28}. If we have left our first love, let us trace where we fell off and opening our hearts, Christ will receive us.

**Thursday: Ephesians: A Christ-Saturated Letter** – The Lesson writer asks: In the church of which you are a part, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, God is drawing together a transnational, multilingual, multiracial, cross-cultural community (Rev. 14:6, 7) that points the way to the fulfillment of His plan to unite all things in Jesus (Eph. 1:9, 10). How can we work in concert with God's grand plan? Accept the Son of God. You do not have to do something to propitiate God and reconcile Him to you. You are "accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Your part is to accept Christ. Christ is "the only begotten Son of God." But in Him "we have obtained an inheritance" (Ephesians 1:11). The Father hath bestowed the wonderful love upon us, "that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1), just the same as Christ Himself, so that we are "joint-heirs with Jesus Christ" (Romans 8:17). We may be in this world as He is (1 John 4:17), and know that God loves us as He loves Christ.