

# *Off the Shelf*

## *Sunday School Lesson*

### *Ephesians 1*

#### **Background**

1. Ephesus was an ancient seaport city located on the western coast of Turkey (Asia Minor). In Paul's time, the temple of the goddess Artemis was a center of worship. The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens.
2. Ephesus was a Roman provincial capital in Asia Minor. Paul made Ephesus his missionary headquarters for about three years from 53-56AD. (Acts 19:1-20:1)
3. Many of the early church fathers support Paul's authorship. Among those who attest to this are Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas, and Polycarp.
4. The theme is the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. The relationship with Jesus is described in terms of blessings, responsibilities and warfare against evil.

#### **Introduction (1:1-2)**

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

1. Paul begins by reminding the Ephesian Christians that he has a special calling by God to be an apostle. Paul did not earn this position but rather he was chosen by God and taught personally by Jesus. (Acts 26:15-18) *Why do you think Paul begins this way?*
2. Christians are made holy or sanctified by God through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul refers to them as saints. Every born-again believer in Jesus Christ is a saint.
3. Paul asks God to bless them with grace and peace. Grace is how Christians are saved and how we grow spiritually in knowledge and obedience. This is a work of God and not of human effort. We are totally dependent upon God to be saved from our sins and to be perfected in holiness. (Eph 2:8-10)
4. Peace with God is based on the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus and from obedience to his will for our lives. Paul refers to Jesus as both Christ (Savior) and Lord (King).

#### **What it Means to be a Christian (1:3-14)**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and*

*will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you were also included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession –to the praise of his glory.*

1. Praise, thanksgiving, worship and love are among the ways that Christians will eternally honor God for his unmerited favor in saving us and making us holy. We will bear the image of Jesus in heaven. We will become royalty and enjoy abundant privileges because we are God’s adopted children. This is the most generous rags to riches story in history! (Jn 1:12-13; Rom 8:17; 1 Jn 3:2)
2. *What is the mystery of God’s will that was revealed?*
3. Mysteries of God’s will are truths that are hidden until God reveals them:
  - a. Kingdom of heaven (Mt 3:50)
  - b. Blindness of Israel (Rom 11:25; 2 Cor 4:4)
  - c. Translation of the saints (1Cor 15:51-52)
  - d. Church as one body composed of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 3:6)
  - e. Jesus as God incarnate (Col 1:15)
  - f. The mystery of inequity (2 Th 2:7)
  - g. Redemption (1 Cor 1:18)
  - h. Predestination (Eph 1:11)

*What are some other mysteries of God’s plans that are yet to be revealed?*

3. God formulated a plan before he created anything. In this plan, he chose some people to be made holy through faith in Jesus. This is for the glory of God and for his pleasure in sharing his love and life with the saints. (Rom 9:10-21; Phil 12-13; 2 Ti 2:19-20)
4. Paul says that those who believe in Jesus are sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s presence within believers is a sign of God’s favor. A seal is a sign of ownership, security, authority, approval and assurance of salvation. (Mt 27:66; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Rev 7:3)
5. *How do I know for sure that I am sealed (saved)?* (2 Cor 13:5) There are ways that you can test yourself to see if the Holy Spirit dwells within you:
  - A. *Do you love to read, listen to and memorize the Bible?*
  - B. *Do you love to be with Christians?* Birds of a feather flock together.
  - C. *Do you like to talk to God through prayer?* This is more than praying when you want something. It is a daily and continuous dialogue in your mind.
  - D. *Do you seek to please God through acts of kindness towards others.*
  - E. *Is Jesus the most important person in your life?*

- F. *Has your thinking changed?* The Holy Spirit changes your mind so that you no longer desire sinful things and replaces them with wanting to do God's will. (Rom 12:1-2)
6. *Has the Holy Spirit produced character changes in you?* Look for evidence of increases in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5:22-23)

### **Prayer For Knowledge & Power (1:15-20)**

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

1. Faith in Jesus expresses itself in love for other Christians. The encouragement, wisdom and common spiritual bond leads us to give thanks often for other believers. *How have other Christians helped you in your faith? Have you thanked other Christians for what they mean to you and have done for you?*
2. Christians are called to pray for each other. *Why is it important to share prayer requests and praises to God when he answers prayers?*
3. The Holy Spirit does his work in Christians in unity with the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit reveals the will and truths of God. His presence enables believers to experience the love of God and helps them to enter a deeper relationship (with him.).
4. Having a loving and tender heart towards God enables a person to receive divine truth and wisdom.
  - A. Born again Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This presence within gives the believer certainty of salvation and a certain hope for a glorious resurrection. (Rom 8:23-25) *How does this produce patient endurance and forward-looking living?*
  - B. Believers are saints (sanctified or made holy). Christians will receive a glorious inheritance which will bring glory of God for his marvelous love and undeserved mercy. These glorious, promised riches purchased at a horrific price by the crucifixion of Jesus should fill us with wonder. This should also cause Christians to have a sense of self-worth because Jesus chose us and deemed us worthy (for him) to die for.
  - C. God's incredible and undisputed power is our guarantee that we have been saved; that we are able to overcome sin and become like Jesus and that, in the future, we will have pure and glorious bodies in the likeness of Jesus. (Jn 10:28-29; 1 Jn 3:1-3, 5:4-5).

### **Christ The Exalted Head (1:22-23)**

***And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.***

1. God the Father has made Jesus king over everything in heaven and earth. (Mt 28:18; Col 1:16-18)
2. Jesus is the head of the church ***which is his body***. Christians have the mind of Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are united to him in an intimate way, just as our heads are united to the rest of our physical bodies. This unity of mind, soul and body is unbreakable. Christians are the image bearers of Christ. This will become obvious when we are perfected in the resurrection of our bodies.
3. When we are made holy, we will live and move and have our being in perfect harmony with Jesus. We will be completely covered in his likeness while retaining our unique or individual identities.

## ***Off the Shelf***

### ***Sunday School Lesson***

### ***Ephesians 2***

#### **The Human Condition (2:1-3)**

***As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following (it's) desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.***

1. In Chapter 1, Paul describes the blessings that are bestowed upon believers in Christ. In Chapter 2, he describes their condition before they were born spiritually through faith in Jesus. Paul says that everyone begins life in a sinful condition which is described as being dead or separated from God. Humans have a selfish and rebellious nature that is inherited from Adam and Eve. (Gen 2:17; Mt 8:22; 1 Cor 15:22).
2. People without Jesus are living but dead inside. They do not know God and their thoughts are focused on seeking the pleasures and things of life. They may have a belief in God but they cannot know him unless God reveals himself through a spiritual birth. (Jn 1:12-13; 3:3-5; 14:6). Paul says that unbelievers are not sick but dead! They do not need resuscitation. They need resurrection. The only difference between one unbeliever and another is the state of decay and depravity.
3. *What are the ways of the world that Paul says unbelievers follow?*
4. *Who is the ruler of the kingdom of the air? How does this ruler influence the thinking and actions of humans? (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 5:18-19; 2 Cor 4:4)*
5. *What are some cravings of the flesh that occupy our thoughts and influence us to sinful actions?*

6. Paul says that unbelievers are objects of God's wrath. Without the forgiveness offered through faith in Jesus, humans are doomed to suffer punishment for their sins. It is a fearful thing to suffer God's angry judgment. (Heb 10:28-31)

### **From Death to Life in Christ (2:4-10)**

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

1. God has great love for us and he desires to be merciful but our sins must be punished for justice to be done. God sent Jesus to be punished in our place so that those who believe in him can be reconciled to God. (Rom 5:9-10; 2 Cor 5:17-19)
2. God sent his beloved son Jesus while we were enemies of God and spiritually dead (without the Holy Spirit) because of sins. God calls those whom he chooses to be born again spiritually through faith in Jesus. (Jn 3:3-8)
3. The calling of God is by his grace and his will. God gives the gift of faith to those whom he chooses. This is why Paul says that salvation is totally the work of God and does not involve human effort or will. *What is grace?*  
Because we are not saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works.
4. The blessings that result from this spiritual birth are:
  - A. We are saved from eternal punishment for our sins.
  - B. Our bodies will be resurrected and perfected in the likeness of Jesus.
  - C. We will be given positions of honor in heaven.
  - D. We will receive blessings beyond what we can imagine.
  - E. We are the bride, family, and workmanship of Jesus, to his glory.
  - F. Before we were created, God knew about us and had plans for each of us to do good works. These good works are done through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We get to participate in his glorious deeds.

### **The Unity of Jews and Gentiles (2:11-18)**

*Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and*

***peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

1. Paul reminds the Gentile Christians that, before they put their faith in Jesus, they were ignorant of the promises of God. They had no relationship with God and so they were without hope. They were shunned and disliked by the Jews who considered them to be inferior and unclean. Their only hope was to become Jewish converts like Rahab and Ruth.
2. Jesus brought unity and peace by his blood. There are no longer racial, religious, ethnic or other distinctions. In the eyes of God, there are only his children saved by faith in Jesus and the children of the devil who reject Jesus. (Jn 8:42-47; 1 Jn 3:10)
3. The religious pride of the Jewish leaders blinded most of them and they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. *How does religious pride cause problems and divisions within Christian churches? How does this pride keep people from being born again through faith in Jesus?*
4. Believers in Jesus are no longer Jews or Gentiles but a new creation. Jesus is the first of a new race of people who are given the holiness and identity of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus has destroyed the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles as well as between God and mankind (for those who have faith). (2 Cor 5:16-17)
5. The death of Jesus on the cross fulfilled the required punishment due for the sins of mankind. Jesus did not come to abolish the requirements of the laws of God but to fulfill them. Therefore, Paul is not saying that the requirements of the laws of God no longer apply to Christians. Everyone will be judged by the laws and commands of God, but Christians have been forgiven for their failure to keep them. (Mt 5:17-20; Rom 10:1-4)
6. Access to God the Father is only through the Holy Spirit who indwells and transforms those who put their faith in Jesus. (Jn 14:6; 1 Cor 6:19; Phil 3:20-21)

### **The Identity of Christians (2: 19-22)**

***Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

1. Paul says that Christians are citizens who have legal rights to be in the household of God as adopted children. (Rom 8:15-17) The apostles and prophets were those who taught what God commanded but Jesus is the one upon whom the gospel and the church depend. (1 Cor 3:11)
2. Paul says that the Christians are like parts of a building. Christians are given unique gifts, lives and places of honor in the kingdom of God much like the parts of a building. Christians are made holy because of the redemptive work of Jesus. *What gifts has God given you? What work has God given you to build his kingdom?*
3. The devil fell and became evil because he left his assigned place in heaven and

- wanted to take God's place. (Isa 14:12-15) Many of the ten commandments teach us not to covet the things and persons who belong to others. (Dt 5:18-21) Envy and selfish ambition are root causes of evil. (James 3:16) Therefore, be thankful for what God has given you and grow where God has planted you!
4. Christians are a new race of humanity who are to have a vibrant love for each other and for God. They are to be models of integrity and moral living. They are to be compassionate and caring for others. There should be something different and good about Christians. *What are some reasons why Christians and churches fail to live up to these standards?*

## ***Off the Shelf***

### ***Sunday School Lesson***

### ***Ephesians 3***

#### **Mystery of Christ's Body The Church (3:1-12)**

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

1. Paul says that it was for the inclusion of the Gentiles that God appointed him by his gracious choice to share the gospel with everyone. (1 Cor 9:19-23)
2. Paul refers to himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Some scholars think that he was a Roman prisoner when he wrote this. Paul also refers to himself as a slave or servant bound to share the gospel as a priority in his life (and thus a prisoner in this sense). (Rom 1:1; 6:16; 1 Cor 9:16)
3. The Mystery of Christ has many aspects that were revealed directly to the apostles and prophets:
  - A. Jews & Gentiles are equal and united in one body which is the Church.

- B. Christians are forgiven of sins and made righteous through faith in the atoning death of Jesus. (Jn 3:16-18)
  - C. Christ indwells each believer. (Col 1:27)
  - D. Christians are the Bride of Christ (Eph 5: 22-23)
  - E. The resurrection and perfection of the saints. (1 Cor 15:51-57; 1 Jn 3:1-3)
4. Paul refers to himself as the least of God's people because (he) once persecuted Christians. (1 Cor 15:9) He also could be making a lesser statement about his Roman name, Paulus, which means little. Some scholars think that he was of short stature.
  5. It is through the gospel taught by the Church that the mystery of God's wisdom and purpose has been revealed to angels and authorities in heaven. (1 Pet 1:12)
  6. Christians are highly blessed creatures who able to approach God with freedom and confidence because of the work of Jesus. (Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-22)
  7. *What are some positive and negative thoughts and emotions that you might experience when you pray? Why is this? If God always hears our prayers, what are his possible responses?* (1 Jn 5:14-15; Dan 9:20-23; 10:12-13)
  8. Jesus taught us how to pray in Luke 11:2. This prayer starts by glorifying God, asking for his will to be done, acknowledging our dependence upon him each day, seeking forgiveness and help in forgiving others, as well as guidance and protection from evil. In short, prayer is more than what we want or think needs to be done.

### **Paul's Prayer for Knowledge Of God's Purpose (3:13-21)**

*I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

1. *What are Paul's sufferings that might cause the believers to be discouraged? Are you sometimes discouraged by your own sufferings or those of other believers? Why?*
2. Christians should find joy and honor in suffering for the name of Jesus. (Act 5:41; 2 Th 1:3-5)
3. For this reason (the glory of Christ shown in believers) Paul prays:
  - A. The Holy Spirit will strengthen them and transform them so that they will become mature, stable and intelligent Christians. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who changes our character, so we become more like Jesus. (Rom 12:2; Phil 1:6; Gal 5:22-25)

- B. Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. Christian faith is deepened by experiences that confirm the presence of God within. *What are some of your experiences that have confirmed that the Holy Spirit dwells within you?*
  - C. As we learn of the immense love of God for us, our devotion and desire to be like Jesus and to serve him grow. *How has God's love changed you?*
4. Closing Prayer
- A. God's power through the ministry of the Holy Spirit enables Christians to become people who do works that they might have previously thought to be impossible. *Can you think of some examples?*
  - B. Evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit:
    - i. There is an internal sense of the **presence of God** that manifests itself in "we versus me" thinking. This changes the way we see life and others compared to before being born again. Christians grow to see the depths of their sinful condition now remedied in Jesus. This causes profound and continuing emotions of gratitude, humility and joy.
    - ii. Christians have a **sense of purpose** that comes from being part of the kingdom of God. There is a desire to be in community with other believers and take actions that others may know Jesus (grow the kingdom).
    - iii. There is a **sense of the power of God at work within** through answered prayers, protection from evil and works of service.
    - iv. There is **passion for God** that drives believers to know him better and follow his commands. This causes changes that are manifest in acts of dedication, self-control, captivated thinking and enthusiastic sacrifice and service.
5. The redemptive work of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit within Christians brings glory to God. (1 Cor 15:24-28; Phil 2:9-11)

## *Off the Shelf*

### *Sunday School Lesson*

### *Ephesians 4*

#### **Christian Behavior (4:1-6)**

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

1. Paul says that Christians are to live consistent with the facts of their new identities in Christ:
  - A. Humility is a sign of the character and lifestyle of Christians. We have been given salvation through the gift of faith; adoption into the family of God; made glorious and holy as children of God bearing his likeness and with a fantastic inheritance beyond imagining. None of these were earned or deserved. They were all blessings bestowed upon us. Therefore, our unworthiness is expressed in humility. (Rom 8:15, 29-30; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Pet 1:3-5)
  - B. The Holy Spirit works to produce gentleness within believers. We are to be submissive to God's will and without retaliation to those who are unkind to us. To be gentle is to be compassionate and caring for others in a respectful way. Jesus (modeled) gentleness. (Mt 11:29)
  - C. Patience or endurance when faced with trials is another work of the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5:22) Paul says that we must love others even when they are unlovable.
2. God is the perfect example of unity among the three persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit within believers works to conform us to the thinking and actions of God's will. The Holy Spirit is our bond. We have a common relationship that promotes peace and unity. *Why then are there so many denominations within the Church?*
3. Instead of magnifying differences, Paul says that we should focus on the major realities that unify Christians:
  - A. There is one church or body of Christ. Physical, ethnic, class, education or any other differences are superficial. When we are resurrected, our bodies will be like Jesus and so there will only be one race or type of human. This reality drives us to love other believers and see them as brothers and sisters in Christ and as part of our Christian family.
  - B. The Holy Spirit indwells each Christian. This light and presence seen in others gives us encouragement, comfort and love for fellow believers. (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19)
  - C. We have a common faith and hope that God will fulfill his promises to save us and bring us to perfection and union with him.
  - D. Jesus is our Lord. His lordship demands obedience which produces unity.
  - E. The Christian faith defines us and what we believe. There is only one true faith and one God. (Jn 14:6)
  - F. The baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs, when a person believes in Jesus and is born again, is our common experience. External forms and practices of baptism vary but there is only one spiritual baptism.
  - G. Christians have a father in heaven who we worship and call upon as our Papa (*Abba* Father). This Father is supreme in his authority, knowledge, presence and power.

### **The Preservation Of Unity Through Diversity (4:7-16)**

***But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?***

*He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

1. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. People do not have equal gifts and talents. Everyone has been given unique blessings that define us; our places in the world (and for Christians, in the body of Christ). (1 Pet 4:10)
2. Paul summarizes the work of Jesus in descending from heaven to be born. His sacrificial death and his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Salvation is totally the work of Jesus and so he is the one who bestows the grace of salvation through election. Believers are being made into a holy people through the work of the Holy Spirit. This work will be completed at the resurrection of believers. Jesus is the supreme king over every part of the universe. (Jn 3:35; 1 Pet 2:9-11)
3. Jesus, through working of the Holy Spirit and in keeping with the will of the Father, calls and enables people to become part of his body which is the Church. The Church is founded upon leaders who were the apostles, prophets (Mark/Luke), evangelists (Stephen/Phillip), pastors (elders/presbyters), and teachers.
4. The work of the church leaders is to equip God's people for works of service. These good works grow the number of believers. Sound biblical teaching helps Christians to have a stronger faith through knowledge about Jesus and promotes unity. *What is the fullness of Christ?*
5. Think of some "mature" Christians. *What qualities or characteristics do they have that cause you to think of them as mature Christians?* (Gal 5:22-26)
6. Mature Christians have confidence in Jesus because they know and believe in the Bible. They also have a deep and personal love relationship with Jesus that enables them to speak truth with love. Truth and love are both needed to grow other Christians and to reach the lost. (1 Pet 3:15-16)

### **The Ways of the Lost and Saved (4:17-24)**

*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ this way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by*

*its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

1. *Who are Gentiles? Why is their thinking futile?* (2 Tim 3:2-9)
2. Characteristics of the thinking of the lost:
  - A. Their understanding is limited or darkened. They can only understand the material world. They are blinded to the greater spiritual realities because their sins have separated them from the life of God.
  - B. Their lives are empty and without purpose. There may be lots of activity but nothing lasting is accomplished.
  - C. They seek happiness through pleasures regardless of whether the source is good or evil. Their lives revolve around stimulating things such as drugs, sexual immorality and seeking various types of food. These things produce temporary pleasures such that they lust for more.
  - D. They are never satisfied. There is no lasting happiness in the accumulation of power, wealth, pleasures or experiences of life. (Ps 39:4-6; Eccl 1:2-11; 2:24-26)
3. Paul says that God is not found through the pursuits and pleasures of the world. In fact, these things keep people preoccupied such that they do not seek God.
4. Believers are to stop living for the pursuits and pleasures of the world. This is like taking off old clothes and putting on new ones. This does not mean that there is no pleasure in living the Christian life. There is abundant life and lasting happiness that does not depend upon circumstances. There are also many pleasures such as those that come from proper relationships, such as marriage. (Jn 10:10; Col 3:5-10)
5. *How does a Christian put off the natural man and put on the life and likeness of Christ?* The old self is not made over or improved. It must die and be replaced. This is accomplished by seeking the truth (Bible) and by being obedient to the will of God revealed by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 12:1-2; Gal 2:20)

### **Exhortations for Christian Living (4:25-32)**

*Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin:" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

1. The devil is the author and father of all lies and deception. Christians are called to be a holy people who are characterized by honesty and integrity. This is especially needed in our relationships with fellow Christians who are our relatives through the blood of Jesus. (Jn 8:44; Col 3:9)

*Why do you think Paul listed honesty first as an essential behavior? What are some reasons for telling lies?*

3. Do not let anger cause you to sin. *How does this happen? Is there any time that anger can be righteous? (Mk 3:5; Jn 2:14-16) Why is righteous anger hard for us?* Anger is momentary insanity. Anyone can become angry, wrote Aristotle. 'But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.'
4. Do not let the sun go down while you are angry. *What does this mean? Why is it bad to remain angry?* Anger is a form of emotional bondage. It consumes the thoughts of those who choose to foster it. It is self-centered thinking that leads to bitterness and damaged relationships. It gives the devil a foothold from which further evil actions and thoughts originate.
5. Repentance is the antidote for anger. This is the process of changing your thinking about something or someone.
  - A. It begins by looking beyond yourself to understand the reasons for what happened to make you angry.
  - B. Avoid defending yourself through using "If, but or maybe."
  - C. Express regret for your part by apologizing to God and others.
  - D. Accept the consequences of the damage done by your anger.
  - E. Change your behavior. Beware of thinking patterns and habits that lead to anger.
  - F. Allow time for the offended person to accept your offer of forgiveness. Do not expect others to immediately respond. They may have to deal with their own anger. Your positive actions will prove the sincerity of your words.
5. Do not steal. Stealing comes from the selfish nature that Christians are to put to death. Paul says that everyone should work to support themselves and to have something to share with those in need. Charity is an expression of love.
6. Speak helpful not hurtful words. Self-control that honors God requires that Christians speak words that instruct and encourage others. Words that injure or cause problems and spread rotten attitudes and actions among others must be avoided.
7. Do not rebel against the leading of the Holy Spirit. Christians who rebel against the Holy Spirit lose their joy and are miserable. God defines our relationship through the Holy Spirit but our obedience and desire for God define the rate of spiritual growth.
8. Paul says Christians are to reject bitterness, rage and anger which come from the sinful nature. (Gal 5:19-21) *How can these be gotten rid of?* We must begin by seeing the sin within and the stories we tell ourselves in our minds. Bad stories lead to bad actions.
9. Being kind and compassionate shows love and a focus on the needs of others. It is easier to forgive others when we realize how much we have been forgiven by Jesus. This is part of the prayer that Jesus taught. (Lk 11:2-4)  
*What do you think about the saying "Forgive and forget?" How does this compare with how God treats our sins?*

# *Off the Shelf*

## *Sunday School Lesson*

### *Ephesians 5*

#### **Christian Behavior (5:1-7)**

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly beloved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must be not even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them.*

1. Paul says that Christians are obligated to follow the ways of Jesus because he is our king. Therefore, we are to love others sacrificially. Jesus subjected himself and his will to God the Father to save those whom the Father had chosen to be his children. (Rom 5:6-8)  
To live a life of love means that we put our desires second to seeking what is best for others. Parents usually do this for their babies. *What are some ways that you have loved sacrificially for others? What are some ways that you can do better in loving others?*
2. Paul says that there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality and impurity among Christians. The human sex drive is powerful and is a continual challenge to control. Likewise, greed comes from selfishness and the desire to have power and pleasure. These sinful urges can only be conquered by seeking to love God first and foremost. In this way, the Holy Spirit helps us to put to death the desires of the flesh. (1 Pet 4:1-2; 1 Jn 2:16-17)
3. The Bible teaches that what we say reflects our thoughts and character. Both good and evil words spring from the tongue. Paul tells Christians that they must control what they say. Foolish talk and coarse joking dishonor God. We are his children and we should behave consistent with his holy example. (Gal 5:16; Jas 3:1-12)
4. Those who live sinful lives seek to entice others into joining their immoral actions. (1 Cor 15:33)  
Paul says that those whose lives are characterized by sinful habits show that they are not saved. *How does this differ from carnal Christians whose spiritual growth is very slow?* (1 Cor 3:1-4)
5. Paul says that Christians must not partner with unbelievers. *What does this mean?*  
To partner with someone means that we share common goals, resources and values. *In what ways does the church partner with the world?*  
Name some good and bad ways that the church partners with the world. Paul warns that the church must not accept sinful practices. In the Old Testament, marriages between Jews and Gentiles caused the Jews to accept the worship of false gods. This

still happens when Christians and unbelievers marry. (Dt 7:1-4; 2 Cor 6:14)

### **Walk in the Light (5:8-17)**

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is the light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Be very careful then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.*

1. Paul says that unbelievers are darkness. They are without the life and light of the Holy Spirit. Christians have the light of God within and so they must live according to the will of God. (1 Jn 1:5-9)
2. Obedience to God produces goodness, righteousness and knowledge of the truth. It also produces a sense of God’s approval within. *Have you experienced the pleasure of God within?*
3. *How do Christians expose sin in others through their lives? What happens when Christians do not confront sin in themselves and others?* Christians are to be salt and light that influence others. When the ideas and values of the world influence the Church the morality of the culture declines. (Mt 5:13-16)
4. People are either enlightened by light as it helps them to see or they are irritated by it because it exposes things that are wrong. *What are some ways that God has revealed evil to you?*
5. Christians are to share the gospel of Jesus to those who are spiritually dead or asleep so that they might come alive and become children of light. This is a daily responsibility because life brings many opportunities to share the gospel each day. It is the will of Jesus that his disciples share the gospel and seek to follow him as their Lord as well as their savior. Many churches stress the importance of accepting Jesus as their savior but do not put as much emphasis on knowing him and obeying him as their king. Salvation is a payment for sins through faith in Jesus. This is a one time, legal and instantaneous event. Sanctification is the process of becoming holy or more like Christ. This requires knowing and obeying Jesus as lord.

### **Be Filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18-20)**

*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1. Paul contrasts the excessive consumption of wine with being filled with the Holy Spirit.

- A. Wine is a product of this world and it can interfere with our thinking and make us dull to the will of God. The Holy Spirit dwells within Christians and works to clarify our thinking and helps us to focus on spiritual things.
  - B. Wine and the Holy Spirit both affect behavior when a person is filled. However, behavior is not affected noticeably when only small quantities of wine are consumed. This explains why many Christians blend into the world. They are not filled with the Holy Spirit.
  - C. The filling of the Holy Spirit is something that happens as we live in obedience to God. Just as we grow physically and require more food to be filled, so our capacity to be filled spiritually grows as we become more like Jesus. This requires that we confess and reject all known sins (1 Jn 1:5-9) Surrender our will, mind, body, talents, time and our treasures to God. We must die to self so that we can be alive in Christ. (Gal 2:20) Study, memorize and meditate on the Bible (Col 3:16-17)
2. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit burst into thanksgiving, worship and praise expressed in psalms, hymns and songs. There is tremendous joy and endowment with knowledge and abilities when the Holy Spirit fills his people. (Ex 35:30-35; Lk 1: 67-79; Acts 13:52)
  3. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit see the presence and mercies of God in every circumstance of life. They are humbled by God's love and faithfulness to grow them and protect them from evil. They are filled with gratitude and wonder.
  4. There is a strong desire to fellowship and be in unity with other Christians. This desire enables them to submit to each other because they see Christ in others. There is boldness in rebuking sin and sharing the gospel. (Acts 4: 8-12; 13:9-12) There is generosity and unselfishness. (Acts 4:31-32)

## **Be Submissive and Serve with Love (5:21-33)**

***Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his***

*wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

1. Paul says that Christians are to submit to each other motivated by love and to honor the example of Jesus who modelled (modeled) submission. Jesus submitted to the will of the Father in coming to earth and living a life that obeyed God’s commands. Then he offered himself as a sinless sacrifice on behalf of those who have faith in him to reconcile them to God. (Lk 22: 24-27; Php 2:5-8)
2. Christians must follow the example of their Lord Jesus. To submit means to voluntarily give something up for the benefit of someone else. The three persons of the triune God are equal but they have different roles. This promotes unity and expresses love. Likewise, wives are to submit to their husbands out of respect for God who ordained that man should have this authority. Wives have a role like Jesus that is not inferior but that of a servant who promotes unity and love.
3. The body of Christ is the Church (born again believers). He is the head and commands the rest of the body. Husbands are to lead by serving and cherishing their wives. Husbands are commanded to follow the example of Jesus who cares for us and loves us.
4. Jesus is the provider for the redemption of his people called by grace and given faith. (Eph 2:8-10) Likewise, husbands are to provide for their wife. Part of the husband’s role is to provide the means for the wife to bear children so that they become one flesh. This is a picture of what Jesus has done for us in providing for resurrected bodies that are in his likeness. (1 Jn 3:1-2)
5. This view of marriage and the roles of husbands and wives is not popular today. *Why is this?*

## ***Off the Shelf***

### ***Sunday School Lesson***

### ***Ephesians 6***

#### **Parent & Children Relationships (6:1-4)**

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

1. Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord.” The only time that disobedience

- is allowed is when the parents are telling their children to disobey the teachings of the Bible. In this case, the children are to respectfully point out the error. *If the parent persists in requiring something wrong, what should the child do?*
2. The Bible teaches that obedience to parents is commanded by God and will bring blessings. (Ex 20:12)
  3. Paul tells fathers to treat their children with respect. They are to avoid making unreasonable demands upon their children. Fathers are responsible to teach their children with love. (Dt 6:4-9)
  4. Many parents have given the responsibility of teaching their children to schools. *What are some problems with this?*

### **Respect Those in Authority (6:5-9)**

***Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.***

1. In Paul's day, most slaves served among families(,) so this section fits in well with the teaching about household relationships. It is estimated that about one-third of the people in the Roman Empire at this time were slaves (approximately 60 million). Many of these people were Christians. Most ancient Greeks and Romans regarded slaves as little more than living tools.
2. The principle of master and servant applies in today's workplace. Paul says that Christians are to work for their bosses as though they were working for Jesus. (I removed spaces)
3. Christians are to show respect and strive for excellence knowing that they will be judged for the quality of their work. They must be diligent and consistent in doing their best whether their boss is watching or not. Ultimately, we work for the glory of God.
4. The motivation for doing the best work is to win the praise of God (and the boss) for a job well done. This is regardless of whether there is any extra monetary or promotional gains. (Mt 25:19-29)
5. In the first few centuries of the Church, Christian slaves brought higher prices because of their motivation for doing work faithfully and with excellence as a goal. Christian workers today should be more valuable because of their work ethic. They should work knowing that Jesus is always watching and that he will reward those who diligently seek to serve him in everything they do. *Why is this not always true? What are some ways to keep your focus on pleasing the Lord throughout the day?*
6. Masters, or those who are in authority over others, are instructed to treat their workers well. They should be fair, kind and honest giving praise and rewards for work that is well done. Those who rule over others must do so with fear knowing

that God is their ruler and he will judge them for abusing their authority.

### **Call To Arms (6:10-20)**

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all of the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***

1. Paul experienced significant demonic activity in Ephesus. He warns the Christians in Ephesus to rely on the power and provisions of God to resist evil. (Acts 19:13-20)
2. Paul explains how to be strong in Lord and access his power.
  - A. We must put on the full armor of God. The devil will attack in various ways such as through confusion, discouragement, moral failures and false teaching. Therefore, we need to have God's protection from every direction. Self-control based on faith, love for God and the hope of salvation are where we begin. (1 Th 5:8)
  - B. Demonic attacks and temptations come from the ideas of the world and the desires of the flesh that contradict the Bible. *What are some examples?* Demonic attacks can also be more direct. *Can you think of some examples?*
  - C. Christians are always on duty. We must remain alert. This requires studying the Bible, prayer and fellowship with other Christians to help us recognize and resist evil. (1 Pt 5:8-9)  
The devil tries to get people to doubt, deny, disregard, and disobey the Bible. Through science and logic, the cultures of the world seek to get people to believe that they can get along very well without God. (1 John 2:15-17). The flesh tempts us to think that we can find satisfaction, joy, and fulfillment based on the things of life. (Eccl 1&2)
  - D. There are multitudes of evil angels working against us. These angels are powerful and seek to destroy us through mental, physical and spiritual methods. We are helpless without the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us and protect us. (Ps 25:4-5; 32:7-8; 119:133)
3. Paul says that evil times will happen to everyone. When this happens,

Christians are commanded to be like soldiers standing in their faith and doing their duty. This means that we are to continue to obey, love and serve God according to his commands despite opposition.

4. Paul describes the various sources of protection available to Christians. He uses the armor of the Roman soldiers to describe them.
  - A. The Roman soldier would first put on a belt that would hold the breastplate and sword scabbard in place. Paul describes the belt as the truth of the gospel and the breastplate as representing our righteous standing by faith in Jesus. These are the foundation of our relationship with God. Christians must seek the truths of the Bible and live according to God's will for our lives.
  - B. Next the Christian is to go forth and share the gospel. Roman infantrymen wore tough sandals studded with sharp, thick nails on the bottoms to increase traction. *Do you think that sharing the gospel is a good indicator of the spiritual health of a Christian or of a church? Why? What is within the Christian that gives traction to our actions?* (Mt 28:18-20; 1 Cor 9:16)
  - C. Soldiers moving into enemy territory need a shield to protect them. Likewise, Christians need to rely on their faith to share the gospel and live according to God's commands. (Heb 11:1)
  - D. The Roman soldier's shield was wood covered with leather to make it flame retardant. It was rectangular in shape and about two and one-half feet wide by four feet long. With it the soldier could protect his whole body. Before a battle in which flaming arrows might be shot at them, the soldiers wet the leather covering with water to extinguish the arrows. The Roman legionaries could close ranks with these shields, the first row holding theirs edge to edge in front, and the rows behind holding the shields above their heads. In this formation they were practically invulnerable to arrows, rocks, and even spears. *Do you see any possible analogies between this picture and being with Christians?*
  - E. The helmet protects the head and our ability to think and act correctly. Christians have the assurance of salvation and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit to set our minds on God and heaven. (Mt 6:19-21; 1 Th 5:8-11; Heb 12:2)
  - F. The sword carried by the Roman infantryman was short and two-edged. Soldiers used it to thrust and cut in hand-to-hand combat. The Bible is like a sword because it is the word of God. (Heb 4:12) The words of God are powerful and cannot be changed or challenged because God is almighty and he is king of everything. Jesus used the words of Scripture to repulse the devil. Christians are to memorize and use the Bible to fight against fears and temptations. (Ps 56:3-4; 1 Cor 10:13; Phil 4:6-9) *What Bible verses do you use when tempted?*
5. Paul says that Christians are to pray in the Spirit continually. (1 Th 5:17) *What does this mean?*
  - A. Prayers are to be inspired and led by the Holy Spirit. Prayers are not to be mindless repetition. Our minds must be focused on what God is

telling us and how he is leading us in prayer. Paul says that all kinds of prayers should be prayed.

*B. What kinds of prayers are there?*

PRAY acronym: P=(P)raise and thanksgiving; R=Repent is to change your thinking and admit sins; A=Ask for others; Y=Yourself

6. Paul asks for prayer that he might fearlessly or boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel. *Where is Paul when he writes this epistle? Why do you think he is concerned about boldness in his witness for Jesus?*
7. *Do you think there is a reason why Paul lists prayer after his discourse on preparing for spiritual warfare? Why not start with prayer?*

## **Conclusion (6:21-24)**

***Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.***

1. *Who is Tychicus?* (Acts 20:4, Col 4:7, Eph 6:21)
2. Paul concludes by wishing his fellow Christians peace, faith and love which lead to unity. Unity by the blood of Christ and as the Bride of Christ. Unity is required to be in the kingdom of God. *How is God an example of unity?*
3. Our love for God will never end and so it is described as undying. Christians have an eternally secure love relationship with God. (Jn 3:16-18; 10:27-30)