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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904

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Principal Contributor
John K. McVay

Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Tricia Wegh

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Editorial Assistant
Sharon Thomas-Crews

The teachers edition components were written by the following:

The Overview, Commentary, and Life Application, Lessons 1–14: Gheorghe Razmerita, associate professor in the Historical Theological Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

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Ephesians: How to Follow Jesus in Trying Times



In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul tells us about the Ephesians themselves. Years after the exciting events of the early days of Christian mission in Ephesus, the Ephesians struggled with the significance of their Christian faith.

Paul, once the troubler of the economy of this fourth-largest city in the Roman Empire, is now sidelined and imprisoned. Writing from prison, he worries that the believers in Ephesus may “lose heart,” forgetting any active sense of what it means to be disciples of Jesus in the sophisticated, urban, and thoroughly pagan culture of Ephesus. Though his hearers are already Christians, Paul’s tone is one of recruitment. He seeks to reenlist them in the Christian faith, to reignite the fire of their devotion to Christ, and to resurrect the excitement of being part of God’s great enterprise in the world, the church.

Because the Christian faith is all about Christ, Paul radiates admiration and worship of Him. If wobbly Christian disciples are to regain their footing, it will be because they recapture their first love for Jesus and establish fresh trust in His grace and power. So, Paul highlights Christ’s exaltation in heaven above all the powers and deities that seek to attract the devotion of believers in Ephesus. Jesus is the goal of the divine plan for the ages, a plan in which believers, as the church, play an important role in God’s plans to unify all things in Christ.

As Paul seeks to draw believers in Ephesus into fresh devotion to their Lord, he does not dumb down the demands of Christian discipleship. He spells out in some

detail what Christian behavior and community look like. Christians are called to Spirit-inspired, Christ-honoring, God-directed worship, which Paul illustrates again and again. A devotion to Christ impacts how one acts and speaks. To love Christ means to respect and value fellow believers. It means resisting the patterns of mean-spirited and sexually decadent behavior so rampant in their culture. It means, in our relationships within church and household, borrowing from the example of self-sacrifice offered by Christ. It means offering fellow citizens of Ephesus clear examples of a new pattern of human existence.

Paul spends a good deal of his letter expressing his excitement for this new pattern of what it means to be human through membership in God's church. He is especially invigorated by the thought that God has joined estranged segments of humanity—Jews and Gentiles—as one in the church. In living out unity where hostility would be expected, they have an opportunity to exhibit the characteristics of God's new society and the coming kingdom.

In pursuing the importance of being part of God's church, Paul develops four metaphors for the church. Believers make up the *body* of Christ, demonstrating their devotion to Christ and their unity with each other. They are a *living temple*, built through the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, in which God is worshiped. They are the *bride* of Christ, who look toward a grand marriage ceremony when the Bridegroom comes to claim them as His own. In a final metaphor that expresses Paul's efforts to reenlist them in Christian faith, they are the *army* of Christ, which wages peace in His name, combating the forces of darkness in God's strength as they look toward Christ's return.

Ephesians, then, speaks especially to times like our own, in which the allure of the world and the passing of time threaten to dull Christian discipleship. It lifts up Christ and accents the significance of following Him as engaged, active members of His church as we live out the hope of His return. This quarter we have the privilege of listening prayerfully to Ephesians and experiencing anew the excitement of following Jesus in challenging times.

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John K. McVay, PhD, is president and professor of religion at Walla Walla University in College Place, Washington, USA, where he has served since 2006.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.