

EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What do these books/stories say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

“To be permitted to have a view of God is the highest privilege accorded to man. This privilege should be prized above all earthly distinction or honor.” *ST*, June 16, 1898.

1. To whom was the book of Ephesians first written? (Ephesians 1:1, 15; 3:2) Do these verses sound like Paul was talking to his very good friends in Ephesus?

Setting: Author

The headings in Eph{esians} 1:1, and Eph{esians} 3:1, show that this Epistle claims to be that of Paul. This claim is confirmed by the testimonies of **IRENAEUS**, [*Against Heresies*, 5.2,3; 1.8,5]; **CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA**, [*Miscellanies*, 4, P. 65, and *The Instructor*, 1.8]; **ORIGEN**, [*Against Celsus*, 4,211]. It is quoted by **VALENTINUS**, A.D. 120, namely, Eph{esians} 3:14-18, as we know from **HIPPOLYTUS** [*The Refutation of All Heresies*, p. 193]. **POLYCARP** [*Epistle to the Philippians*, 12], testifies to its canonicity. So **TERTULLIAN** [*Against Marcion*, 5, 17]. **IGNATIUS** [*Epistle to the Ephesians*, 12], which alludes to the frequent and affectionate mention made by Paul of the Christian state, privileges, and persons of the Ephesians in his Epistle.—Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Ephesians. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871). [Italic type, brackets, and content in brackets are in the original; content in curly brackets and bold type are added.]

Paul: This epistle is the work of the apostle Paul, as attested by

- (1) the internal claims of the epistle itself (Ephesians 1:1; 3:1);
- (2) its Pauline literary structure and style;
- (3) its theological similarities to the other Pauline epistles, especially Colossians;
- (4) its historical setting; and
- (5) the unchallenged tradition of the church, until the rise of destructive criticism in the nineteenth century.—*Believer's Study Bible* - article on Ephesians.

Ephesians

What we know about God and what we do for God have a way of getting broken apart in our lives. The moment the organic unity of belief and behavior is damaged in any way, we are incapable of living out the full humanity for which we were created.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians joins together what has been torn apart in our sin-wrecked world. He begins with an exuberant exploration of what Christians believe about God, and then, like a surgeon skillfully setting a

compound fracture, “sets” this belief in God into our behavior before God so that the bones—belief and behavior—knit together and heal.

Once our attention is called to it, we notice these fractures all over the place. There is hardly a bone in our bodies that has escaped injury, hardly a relationship in city or job, school or church, family or country, that isn’t out of joint or limping in pain. There is much work to be done.

And so Paul goes to work. He ranges widely, from heaven to earth and back again, showing how Jesus, the Messiah, is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together. He also shows us that in addition to having this work done in and for us, we are participants in this most urgent work. Now that we know what is going on, that the energy of reconciliation is the dynamo at the heart of the universe, it is imperative that we join in vigorously and perseveringly, convinced that every detail in our lives contributes (or not) to what Paul describes as God’s plan worked out by Christ, “a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.”—Eugene H. Peterson (2005), introduction to Ephesians. *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

2. But, how do you explain the comments in Ephesians 1:15 and Ephesians 3:2? Why do some translations of the Bible not mention Ephesus in Ephesians 1:1? The words *in Ephesus* in Ephesians 1:1 are missing in the earliest manuscripts. Having lived in Ephesus for years, why didn’t Paul have extensive greetings at the end of the book as he did when writing to other churches?

The earliest manuscripts of this epistle—the Chester Beatty papyrus, P⁴⁶, the Codex Sinaiticus, and the Codex Vaticanus—all lack the words *in Ephesus* in Ephesians 1:1. Basil, in the 4th century said he had seen ancient manuscripts of this epistle in which the words *en epheso* were omitted. (See *Against Eunomius* ii. 19.) Origen, in his commentaries, and Tertullian (*Against Marcion* v. 17) agreed with that comment.

While some very recent critics have tried to suggest that Ephesians was not written by Paul, **Clement** (about A.D. 90), **Ignatius**, and **Polycarp**, writing early in the 2nd century all said that Paul was the author. Numerous other early church fathers supported Paul being the author. **This letter was probably intended as an “encyclical” or “general” letter to be passed around to all of the churches in Asia Minor.** This is probably why so few specifics are said about Ephesus, the Ephesian church, and its members.

Some scholars have postulated that about A.D. 90 when the epistles of Paul were being collected and put together for study, some student of Paul who had perhaps been with him and was able to fluently write the ideas of Paul may have put together a letter as a general introduction to Paul’s writings. Since Ephesus was the distribution center for the Christian church at the time, the letter would have been sent there. E. J. Goodspeed was the foremost proponent of this idea. But, few other scholars, particularly conservative scholars, have agreed with him. There is so much of Paul’s thoughts and ideas in this book that it is hard to imagine someone else having been able to write it.

3. Most Christian scholars agree that the book of Ephesians was an encyclical. What is an encyclical? Was it or wasn’t it addressed to the church at Ephesus? Does it make any

difference? If so, why? This book was written from Paul's place of house arrest in the city of Rome. He was hoping to be released soon from that house arrest. Why do some people question the authorship of the book of Ephesians? And why do they question that it was written to the Ephesians?

1. There are some 70 Greek words used in this letter that are not found in any other of Paul's writings. Is this truly a valid argument against Pauline authorship?
 2. There is no long list of greetings at the end of this letter. After spending 2½ years at Ephesus, surely Paul must have known many people. Why didn't he greet them individually as he did in other books?
 3. Some have suggested that another person read Paul's book to the Colossians and fashioned this letter to the Ephesians. Is the fact that these two letters are so similar evidence that Paul did not write one of them? Not at all!
4. What did Paul tell us about the church members in Ephesus in the first verse of Ephesians?
1. They were considered saints.
 2. The believers at Ephesus were faithful. (Revelation 2:1-7)
 3. These believers were "in Christ." What does that mean to you? Is this some magical or mystical relationship?

Setting: Ephesus

5. Paul spent more time with the church at Ephesus than he did with any other church (with the possible exception of the church at Antioch which was his "home church"). What other Christian names were associated with Ephesus?

Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:19,24-26; 1 Corinthians 16:19), **Apollos** (Acts 18:24-26), **Timothy** (with Paul - 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Timothy 1:3), **the apostle John** (Revelation 1:9-11), and **Onesimus**. It is interesting that in about A.D. 110, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the Bishop of Ephesus who was a man named Onesimus.

6. **Who were Aquila and Priscilla?** How did they happen to be in Ephesus? Why do you think Paul was attracted to Aquila and Priscilla? What did they have in common?
1. They were all Jews.
 2. They all had lived and worked in many different cities.
 3. They were all refugees.
 4. And, perhaps most important of all, they were all tent makers.

After working together for some time in Corinth, they traveled together to Ephesus. When Paul saw the opportunity for positive results in Ephesus, he left Aquila and Priscilla there while he traveled to Jerusalem and Antioch.

7. Were Aquila and Priscilla officially apostles? Did they support themselves? (Read Acts 18:2-3,18-19; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-4.)

Aquila and Priscilla not only worked with and supported the apostle Paul but also opened their house to form a home church; moved with Paul to new fields of labor; supported themselves as laymen; and while Paul was traveling in other areas, they brought into the message the fervent and well-educated Apollos. In fact, Aquila and Priscilla

basically risked their lives for Paul and the gospel they loved. **What things in life would you be willing to die for?**

8. **Who was Apollos?** What do we know about him? What was his background? Where did Apollos come from originally? Why was this Jew named after a Greek god? Did he possibly have another name? A Jewish name? (Read Acts 18:24-28; compare Daniel and his three friends [Daniel 1:7].)

Apollos (a-pol'os). [Gr. Apollos, a contraction of Apollonios.] A Jewish convert to the message of John the Baptist, described as being diligent, fervent, and "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24, 25). He was born at the Egyptian city of *Alexandria. After his conversion he became an itinerant evangelist (chs {Acts} 18:24, 27; 19:1). While preaching at Ephesus he met Aquila and Priscilla, Christian Jews, who instructed him in the tenets of Christianity (ch {Acts} 18:26, 28). After this Apollos went to the Roman province of *Achaia, taking with him a letter of recommendation from the church at Ephesus (v {Acts 18:}27). While in Achaia he preached with success in the city of Corinth (chs {Acts} 18:28; 19:1), and because of his abilities became popular with a certain faction that began to exalt him, as opposed to other groups which exalted Paul, Peter, or Christ (1 Cor{inthians} 1:12). This condition received no encouragement from Apollos, and it was doubtless because of it that he refused to return to Corinth when Paul asked him to do so (ch {1 Corinthians} 16:12). In his rebuke to the church for their factious spirit Paul stated that he and Apollos were "one," and "labourers together" (ch {1 Corinthians} 3:6-9).

In his letter to Titus, Paul exhorted him to do all in his power to help Apollos and "Zenas the lawyer," Apollos' traveling companion, in their preparation for a projected journey (Tit{us} 3:13).—Horn, S. H. (1979). In *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* 62-63. Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Brackets, content in brackets, and asterisk are in the original; content in curly brackets is added.]

While Apollos seemed to have been a trained preacher, Priscilla and Aquila were laymen. But, they shared the additional truth about the Holy Spirit and baptism with Apollos. What does it tell us about Apollos that he was willing to accept those new concepts from laymen?

9. What do we know about the city of Ephesus in Paul's day? How large was this city?

There is good evidence to suggest that Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome, Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch in Syria. The estimated population was 300,000. Ephesus was famous for its harbor which is now completely silted in and for its temple to the goddess Artemis (also known as Diana).

10. What do we know about the temple of Artemis/Diana and the worship there? Why do you think Paul was attracted to this city full of sensual worship and idolatry?

There is good evidence to suggest that the worship carried on at that temple was a continuation from the time of the fertility cult religions. There is even some evidence to suggest that the name Artemis was a Greek version of Astarte or Asherah or even Ishtar from the times of the Old Testament. The beautiful temple of Artemis/Diana was built of marble and largely covered with gold. It was considered by many to be the greatest of the

seven wonders of the ancient world. How do you think it compared with Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem?

Furthermore, there was a large tourist industry that sold artifacts of the temple and of Diana to the crowds which came for worship at her temple. When Paul began to preach that gods made by hand are not gods at all, (Acts 19:26) it struck at the very heart of that ancient worship system and the willingness of worshipers to buy small replicas of Artemis/Diana.

Paul went to Ephesus because he was on his way from Corinth; he stopped there briefly, and the people begged him to come back. He actually left Aquila and Priscilla there to work with the people of the church at Ephesus until he returned. Some have suggested that their success in sharing the gospel message was because people came there in large numbers from the east and the west searching for new religious experiences.

The conflict between Christ and Diana is almost as old as the conflict between Christ and Satan. The war is not always about what is right and what is wrong or about who offers the good life and who does not; the conflict is an appeal to the immediate as opposed to the eternal, to the emotional as opposed to the spiritual, to the pleasures of life as opposed to salvation from sin.

The goddess Artemis/Diana, as worshiped by the Ephesians, can be regarded as a symbol of the attractive but empty values that the world offers as the alternative to Christ. (Compare Hebrews 11:24-25.)

- During Paul’s time, the most significant point about Ephesus was not its wealth, commerce, or learning, but rather, its religion. Artemis/Diana—the goddess of fertility whom “all Asia and the world” worshiped (Acts 19:27)—dominated the lives of the people in the city. The cult centered around magic, astrology, and sex—the worship of Artemis/Diana—catered to human pleasures and perversions under the garb of religion. The religious phenomenon was matched by the physical grandeur of Artemis’s (Diana’s) temple. The temple measured 324 by 164 feet. It was considered one of the seven wonders of the world, attracting the worship of the royalty and the poor, the philosopher and the illiterate. By comparison, Solomon’s Temple was only about 90 by 45 feet, not counting the courtyard.

Setting: Date and History

- Where was Paul when he wrote Ephesians and Colossians? What was he doing? (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Colossians 4:3,10,18)

Tentative Chronology of the Early Christian Church and Paul’s Life

Year	Event
Spring 31	Crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost (Luke 23; John 19; Acts 1,2; <i>Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary</i> , vol. 5, 251-254)
34	Stephen stoned; church severely persecuted; gospel carried to Samaria and beyond (Acts 7:1-8:25)
35	Paul converted (Acts 9:1-19)
35-38	Paul at Damascus, Arabia, and back to Damascus (Galatians 1:17)

38	Paul escaped from Damascus during the reign of Aretas; visited Jerusalem “after three years” from Paul’s conversion; (Galatians 1:18) went to his home in Tarsus; worked in Syria and Cilicia. (Galatians 1:21)
44	James the brother of John martyred; Peter imprisoned at Passover time; Agrippa died. (Acts 12)
44-45	Barnabas found Paul at Tarsus and took him to Antioch; Paul remained there “a whole year.” (Acts 11:26)
45	Barnabas and Paul took help for famine relief to Jerusalem. (Acts 11:25-30)
45-47	Paul’s first missionary journey; on return, Paul and Barnabas remained at Antioch “no little time”; (Acts 14:28) the book of James probably written.
49	Jerusalem Council: “Fourteen years after” Paul’s conversion (Galatians 2:1; Acts 15)
49	Paul started his second missionary journey: Preached in Phrygia, Galatia, (joined by Timothy), Troas (joined by Dr. Luke), and entered Europe. (Acts 15:36-16:40)
50-51	Paul arrived at Corinth, staying one and one-half years. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians and a short time later wrote 2 Thessalonians .
52	After the end of his second missionary journey, Paul visited Jerusalem and then spent “some time” at Antioch. (Acts 18:22-23)
53-58	Paul’s third missionary journey: Traveled through Asia Minor, stayed three years at Ephesus, traveled through Macedonia, stayed three months at Corinth. In spring of A.D. 57, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians . Upon learning that things were still not well in Corinth, Paul made a brief but painful visit to Corinth, (2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1-2) probably traveling there directly by boat. Arriving back in Ephesus in late spring or early summer of A.D. 57, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 10-12 . He sent that letter with Titus to Corinth. Some time passed and Paul became very concerned about things in Corinth because he had heard nothing from Titus or Corinth. Paul traveled to Troas where he expected to meet Titus, but he did not find Titus. He traveled on to Macedonia where he met Titus and found that Titus and the “Sinai letter” had been accepted by the Corinthians. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 1-9 from Macedonia and sent Titus back to continue his good work while Paul finished things in Macedonia before continuing on his way to Corinth.
57-58	Paul spent the winter at Corinth, writing Galatians and Romans . He planned to leave in March or April for Jerusalem. Learning of a plot to kill him while aboard ship, (AA 389.2) he decided to travel by land back to Macedonia and from there he traveled by boat to Jerusalem, arriving about Pentecost in mid-June of A.D. 58.

58-60	Paul arrested in temple at Jerusalem, imprisoned, and then sent to Caesarea Maritima where he stayed “two years”; (Acts 21:27-24:27) left in autumn by boat for Rome
60-61	Paul’s journey to Rome: After being shipwrecked on Malta, Paul stayed there over the winter, arriving in Rome in the spring.
61-63	Paul was a prisoner under house arrest in Rome “two whole years.” (Acts 28:30) He wrote Ephesians , Colossians , and Philemon , probably in late A.D. 62. (See Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7-9; Philemon 12; AA 456.) Paul wrote Philippians just before his release from prison in A.D. 63. Hebrews was probably written about that time. Luke wrote or at least finished Acts.
63-66	After being freed from prison in Rome and after visiting Ephesus and Philippi, Paul wrote 1 Timothy in A.D. 64. He traveled to Crete and Greece (Corinth?) and then wrote the letter to Titus , probably in A.D. 65. After being re-arrested (probably in Troas), he was taken to Rome where, after an initial hearing before Nero, he wrote 2 Timothy in the fall of A.D. 66. First Peter probably also was written near that time.
67	The death of Paul and Peter in Rome; both were kept in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. Christians from Jerusalem fled to Pella after the initial Roman seige and then the departure of the Roman army.
70	Destruction of Jerusalem
90-96	John arrested and thrown into a pot of boiling oil, but he did not die. (AA 570.1,2) John was sent to Patmos by Domitian (ruled 89-96). Revelation was written. John was released from Patmos. The Gospel of John, and later, the three letters of John were written. <i>This chronology was derived from multiple sources but is in line with conservative Seventh-day Adventist views of chronology.</i>

Setting: The Book of Ephesians

The theme of the book of Ephesians is unity/harmony/atonement. Paul spent a great deal of time talking about grace and everything is to be done “in union with Christ.”

13. What evidence do we have to suggest that **Paul was in prison** while writing these letters of Ephesians and Colossians? (See Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Colossians 4:3,10,18.)

Ephesians 3:1 (GNB): ¹ For this reason I, Paul, **the prisoner** of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, pray to God.

Ephesians 4:1 (GNB): ¹ I urge you, then—I **who am a prisoner** because I serve the Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you.

Ephesians 6:20 (GNB): ²⁰ For the sake of this gospel I am an ambassador, though now **I am in prison**. Pray that I may be bold in speaking about the gospel as I should.

Colossians 4:3 (GNB): ³ At the same time pray also for us, so that God will give us a good opportunity to preach his message about the secret of Christ. For that is why **I am now in prison**.

Colossians 4:10 (GNB): ¹⁰ Aristarchus, who is **in prison with me**, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have already received instructions to welcome Mark if he comes your way.)

Colossians 4:18 (GNB): ¹⁸ With my own hand I write this: *Greetings from Paul*. **Do not forget my chains!** May God's grace be with you. [Italic type is in the original; bold type is added.]

Paul was in prison four times of which we know: 1) **Philippi** (part of one night) (Acts 16:16-40); 2) **Jerusalem** (about 2 or 3 days) and then taken to **Caesarea Maritima** for two years (Acts 24:27); and then 3) via boat to **Rome** where he was under "house arrest" for two years (Acts 28:30); and 4) again at **Rome** where he was finally condemned and beheaded (2 Timothy 1:16-17; 2:9; 4:6). Conservative scholars are quite certain that the books of Ephesians and Colossians were written at the time he was under house arrest in Rome.

Ephesians 6:19 and Colossians 4:3-11 suggest that Paul had considerable freedom even though he was under house arrest. During that time, Nero was emperor. Immorality, luxury, and murder were rampant. At one point, Lucius Pedanius Secundus, a senator from Rome, was murdered by one of his slaves. Following Roman law, four hundred slaves of his household were condemned to death in retribution.

Setting: The Book of Colossians

14. What was Paul's relationship with the church in Colossae? Had he lived there? Are there any really new insights into our understanding of God, His character, and His way of governing the universe found in the books of Colossians and Ephesians? If you had only Ephesians and Colossians, what picture of God would you have?

Colossae: The City and the Church

Paul was not the one who founded the church at Colossae. However, during the three years he worked at Ephesus, he preached so often and so convincingly that "all the people who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Gentiles, heard the word of the Lord." (Acts 19:10) Even his enemies at Ephesus confirmed that. (See Acts 19:26.) Even when writing to the Corinthians, Paul sent greetings from "the churches in the province of Asia." (See 1 Corinthians 16:19; compare 2 Corinthians 1:8. See Romans 16:5 where some Greek manuscripts have *Achaia*, but the predominance of manuscripts read *Asia*.) Since Ephesus was a great commercial center and seaport as well as religious center, most of the people of Asia who were involved in any business or traveled for other reasons would have been there at some time. Perhaps, Epaphras (Colossians 4:12) and Philemon (See Philemon 1,10-11; Colossians 4:9.) first heard Paul in Ephesus. **In any case, Paul held himself personally responsible for the progress of all the churches in Asia.** When Paul received word, even while he was in Rome, perhaps through Epaphras, (See Colossians 1:8; Philemon 23.) that there was trouble in the church at Colossae, he set about to do what he could to correct things.

It is very likely that the problems that arose in the church at Colossae involved some mixture of Judaism and some type of eastern mysticism—perhaps an early form of Gnosticism. There is considerable evidence in the literature of the time that such mixtures were common. **Paul used words to describe Christian truths that were later often used to describe Gnostic "emanations" or "intermediate beings" who allegedly**

served to mediate between God and humans. In any case, it seems clear that the false teachers at Colossae believed in “angelic beings” arranged in different orders, intermediate between God and our world, beings who acted as mediators, brought them salvation, and deserved their worship. They also apparently insisted on extreme forms of legalistic ceremonialism, taboos involving certain foods and drinks, and the necessity of observing certain religious festivals.

Colossians

Hardly anyone who hears the full story of Jesus and learns the true facts of his life and teaching, crucifixion and resurrection, walks away with a shrug of the shoulders, dismissing him as unimportant. People ignorant of the story or misinformed about it, of course, regularly dismiss him. But with few exceptions, the others know instinctively that they are dealing with a most remarkable greatness.

But it is quite common for those who consider him truly important to include others who seem to be equally important in his company—Buddha, Moses, Socrates, and Muhammad for a historical start, along with some personal favorites. For these people, Jesus is important, but not central; his prestige is considerable, but he is not preeminent.

The Christians in the town of Colossae, or at least some of them, seem to have been taking this line. For them, cosmic forces of one sort or another were getting equal billing with Jesus. Paul writes to them in an attempt to restore Jesus, the Messiah, to the center of their lives.

The way he makes his argument is as significant as the argument he makes. Claims for the uniqueness of Jesus are common enough. But such claims about Jesus are frequently made with an arrogance that is completely incompatible with Jesus himself. Sometimes the claims are enforced with violence.

But Paul, although unswervingly confident in the conviction that Christ occupies the center of creation and salvation without peers, is not arrogant. And he is certainly not violent. He argues from a position of rooted humility. He writes with the energies of most considerate love. He exhibits again what Christians have come to appreciate so much in Paul—the wedding of a brilliant and uncompromising intellect with a heart that is warmly and wonderfully kind.—Eugene H. Peterson (2005), introduction to Colossians. *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

15. What **three cities were near each other** and may have shared letters from Paul? Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. (Colossians 2:1; 4:13,16) Were there other letters from Paul written about the same time? (Colossians 4:16) Where is the letter to the Laodiceans?

Colossians 2:1 (GNB): ¹ Let me tell you how hard I have worked for you and for the people in Laodicea and for all others who do not know me personally.

Colossians 4:13 (GNB): ¹³ I can personally testify to his hard work for you and for the people in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Colossians 4:16 (GNB): ¹⁶ After you read this letter, make sure that it is read also in the church at Laodicea. At the same time, you are to read the letter that the believers in Laodicea will send you.

The Ephesian Church

16. **What was the quality of the church established at Ephesus? See Revelation 2:1-7.**
17. Are you always willing to keep an open mind? Do you have the skills to evaluate evidence and carefully to weigh new ideas?

Christians need to start out as children. (Matthew 18:1-4) But, they must not stay that way! The most important characteristic of a child is his capacity to grow—physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. God has challenged us to grow up spiritually as recorded in places like Ephesians 4:11-16 and Hebrews 5:11-6:3. (See discussion below of Ephesians 4:11-16.)

18. How well has the Seventh-day Adventist Church done at accepting new ideas? What do you know about what happened in 1888? And in 1919?

Churches are inherently very conservative organizations. It is hard for them to change and grow. And the longer they have been around, the harder it is. When a church first starts, it tends to be much more open to new ideas. The Seventh-day Adventist Church had a hard time dealing with the issues at the 1888 General Conference Session and later at the 1919 conference on inspiration, dealing with the writings of Ellen White. Are we doing any better today?

19. What do you think about the effectiveness of Paul's preaching at Ephesus? How many people do you think contributed to the burning of millions of dollars worth of books? (Acts 19:11-20) Were those all church members? How large do you think the church in Ephesus was?

As mentioned above, Ephesus was a very large city. Paul was a newcomer to Ephesus. But, he had had so much influence that the major attraction of the city—the temple of Artemis/Diana—was being threatened. No doubt, considering the size of the bonfire that burned all those books, there must have been thousands who considered Paul's arguments of sufficient merit that they were willing to give up millions of dollars worth of books.

By burning their books on magic, the Ephesian converts showed that the things in which they had once delighted they now abhorred. It was by and through magic that they had especially offended God and imperiled their souls; and it was against magic that they showed such indignation. Thus they gave evidence of true conversion.

These treatises on divination contained rules and forms of communication with evil spirits. They were the regulations of the worship of Satan--directions for soliciting his [289] help and obtaining information from him. By retaining these books the disciples would have exposed themselves to temptation; by selling them they would have placed temptation in the way of others. They had renounced the kingdom of darkness, and to destroy its power they did not hesitate at any sacrifice. Thus truth triumphed over men's prejudices and their love of money.

By this manifestation of the power of Christ, a mighty victory for Christianity was gained in the very stronghold of superstition. The influence of what had taken place was more widespread than even Paul realized. From Ephesus the news was widely circulated, and a strong impetus was given to the cause of Christ. Long after the apostle himself had finished his course, these scenes lived in the memory of men and were the means of winning converts to the gospel.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* 288.3-289.1.

20. Many scholars consider the book of Ephesians to be of great theological and redemptive significance—more important perhaps than any other of Paul’s epistles! Do you share this view? Why? Or, why not? Are there any other of Paul’s books that you consider to be more important?

In the book of Ephesians, Paul laid out his vision for the churches in Asia Minor including Ephesus. Ephesians 1-3 are almost like a long prayer with a doxology at the end. They give a very large picture of what needs to be accomplished in the great controversy—it includes the entire universe. (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10) That is a view that we all need to understand and adopt.

21. Paul began the books of Ephesians and Colossians by calling the church members there “saints.” What is a saint? Paul frequently used the word *saint* in his writings. Were all those people perfect and morally upright? Definitely not! The original meaning of the word *saint* was “called to be one of God’s holy people.” Are you called in the same way? Another meaning for *saint* is “set apart.”

A little girl who attended worship in a place with a lot of stained-glass windows was asked what a saint was. “A saint is a person the light shines through,” she replied. A saint is someone whose life—speech, actions, attitudes, relationships—points to Jesus.—*Life Application Bible Commentary: Ephesians* p. 4.

“What is a saint?” the youngster asked; So his parents set out to explain. By describing Saint Francis and Bernadette they attempted to make it plain. They told of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and ended with John and Paul; But the boy just couldn’t relate to this and didn’t grasp it at all.

Then the parents went to their church and showed him the stained glass windows there; The faces of the elect shone out as they preached or knelt in prayer. The boy was asked if he understood, and he said, “I think I do; With what I’ve seen, I’d say that a saint is a person the light shines through.”—G. Frederick Stork submitted by J. Grant Swank, Jr; *AMG Bible Illustrations*. (2000). Chattanooga: AMG Publishers.

22. What should we learn about God from Ephesians 1:3-5? What does it mean to be chosen in Christ? **Has salvation truly been made available to everyone—even to those in heathen, pagan, or Communist countries who have never heard His name?** (Romans 1:19-20)

These verses make it clear that God has chosen all of us to be His children and through Christ to make each one of us a son or daughter of God. In fact, God’s plan extends to everyone in the universe!

Ephesians 1:10: This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Ephesians 1:10). New York: American Bible Society.

23. Has God chosen some and not others? **Does God choose some people for salvation? And others for destruction? What would that imply? Is our salvation completely decided by God?** Or, do we make a part of the decision ourselves? What do we have to do to make God's plan effective for us?

God wants everyone to choose to join His side in the great controversy. But, He knows that many humans will not choose to do so. To be a part of His family, we must commit ourselves to live according to His government's laws, the Ten Commandments, and to practice His kind of love in all that we do. Can we do that?

24. What does it mean to be adopted by God? Why did Paul seem to emphasize this idea? Note that Paul did not recognize the *Dianas* of mythology, the "gods" of philosophy such as the *unmoved mover* of Aristotle, *the idea of the good* by Plato, or even *the first principle* of the intellectuals of all ages. Paul spoke about a God who dwells in heavenly places. In what ways is our God superior to all others? **Are there really no other gods?** (Exodus 20:3)

Deuteronomy 4:39 (GNB): "So remember today and never forget: the LORD is God in heaven and on earth. **There is no other god.**"

Deuteronomy 32:39 (GNB): " 'I, and I alone, am God; **no other god is real.** I kill and I give life, I wound and I heal, and no one can oppose what I do.' "

Isaiah 43:10 (GNB): "People of Israel, you are my witnesses; I chose you to be my servant, so that you would know me and believe in me and understand that **I am the only God.** Besides me there is no other god; there never was and never will be."

Isaiah 44:6 (GNB): The LORD, who rules and protects Israel, the LORD Almighty, has this to say: "I am the first, the last, the only God; **there is no other god but me.**"

Mark 12:32 (GNB): The teacher of the Law said to Jesus, "Well done, Teacher! It is true, as you say, that only the Lord is God and that **there is no other god but he.**" [Bold type is added.]

25. If you are a Christian, Paul described you as chosen, predestined, and adopted. What do these ideas mean to you? **What is the biblical idea of predestination? Are all predestined? See Romans 8:28-31.** Does God predestine every one of us to be saved? If it is God's will that we all be saved, how can we defy that will? What is implied by the words *acceptance is entirely dependent upon human choice*? (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9) That acceptance leads to adoption as children in God's family. (Romans 8:13-14; Ephesians 1:5) What happens if we do not accept? Does that mean that we are not God's children?

God planned for all of His earthly children to be living in the Garden of Eden. It was never God's plan to have sin conquer us. But, even though we have sinned, God still considers us His children until we finally vote against His ways and His laws so long and so many times that there is no turning back.

26. Traditional Christian theology states: Sin leads to death; so, in order for sin to be dealt with, a death must take place. What does this mean to you? Why is that necessary? Is our

Father-God demanding a death? Shouldn't the sinner be the one who dies? How can Jesus actually, fairly, and justly, take our place?

Have we answered Bozo's/Boso's question posed in the writings of Anselm?

For what justice is there in giving up the most just man of all to death on behalf of the sinner? **What man would not be judged worthy of condemnation if he condemned the innocent in order to free the guilty? ... For if he [God] could not save sinners except by condemning the just, where is his omnipotence? But if he could, but would not, how are we to defend his wisdom and justice?**—Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-April 21, 1109), *Cur Deus Homo?* [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

Anselm was famous for challenging all the conflicting statements of earlier authorities on basic theological propositions. If God is truly omnipotent, as we believe, shouldn't He be able to save humans without the necessity of anyone—especially Jesus Christ—having to die? Did the Father demand the death of Jesus before He would be willing to forgive us? What would that say to us about the Father?

Without an understanding of the cosmic conflict as set forth by Ellen White as she explained Scripture, it is impossible to answer those questions. After seeing this picture outlined by Ellen White, the cosmic conflict as taught in Scripture is more apparent. (See the handout "The Great Controversy Described in Scripture" on the website Theox.org and then Teachers Guides and then General Topics.) But, the cosmic conflict provides wonderful answers to those questions. God has put Himself on trial before the universe. (Romans 3:4) He chooses to win our loyalty by providing the evidence that He is the One who has told the truth about sin and its consequences. He not only told the truth, but also He demonstrated it through the life and death of Jesus.

27. How do you understand these words from one scholar?

Our sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. **Without that shed blood, without a sinless Savior dying for the sins of the world, there is no forgiveness and no redemption (Heb[rews]. 9:22). Jesus' blood paid the penalty for our sins. When we accept that substitutionary death, our sins are forgiven, and we become eligible for the heavenly inheritance, sealed and made sure by the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Take away the Cross, and we have no forgiveness, no salvation, no promise, and no sealing of the Spirit.—Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships, *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, October-December 2005, Lesson 3 for October 8-14, p. 33,35. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

Do you agree with those comments? Why? Or, why not?

28. Could anyone be saved without the shed blood of Christ? Why? Or, why not? How does that actually work? **Was God able to forgive sins before Jesus died on the cross?** If not, what happened to the sins of all the saints in the Old Testament?

Forgiveness of sin is free for us; indeed, we cannot put a price on it or pay for it. But forgiveness on the part of God cost Him much: the blood of Jesus. Sin by its very nature brings death; where a sinner ought to die, a

substitutionary death was necessary. In the Old Testament sanctuary system God provided forgiveness on the basis of shedding an animal's blood. The whole sacrificial system anticipated the day when Christ, "the Lamb of God," would take away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*). Jesus on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. His shed blood makes forgiveness of sins possible (*Rom[ans]. 5:8, 9; Eph[esians]. 2:13; Col[ossians]. 1:20*).—Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships. *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Lesson 3 for Tuesday, October 11, 2005, p. 34. [Content in brackets is added.]

Do you understand how all this actually works? How should we explain Hebrews 10:3-4 (GNB): "3 As it is, however, the sacrifices serve year after year to remind people of their sins. 4For the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins"?

29. Ellen G. White often wrote about our "Substitute and Surety." What do these words mean to you?

Grace is unmerited favor, and the believer is justified without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God. He is justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who stands in the courts of heaven as ***the sinner's substitute and surety***.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, 398. [Bold type and italic type are added.]

30. The official Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath school Bible study guide for Ephesians says:

Christian theology is incomplete without a conclusive eschatology. That means that the great controversy between God and Satan that caused disunity and conflict in heaven will finally see its fitting end—when all things will be united so that "one pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation."—Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships, *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, October-December 2005, Lesson 3 for October 8-14, p. 37.

If there were no future promise of salvation, would any of this matter? (Ephesians 1:10)

31. **Where did the great controversy begin?** In the 21st century, do the loyal angels still have any questions remaining in their minds? (*DA 764.4*) If all God had to do in order to win the great controversy was to destroy His enemies, why didn't He do that long ago? What is God actually trying to accomplish? Does God offer even more than "just salvation"? Has He answered all the questions that Satan has raised about Him and His way of running the universe?
32. Would you agree with this comment from one Seventh-day Adventist scholar: "**The theme of the great controversy, crucial to the Seventh-day Adventist theology and mission, finds its fullest expression in the epistle of Ephesians?**"—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, October-December 2005, Lesson 2, for Saturday, October 1, 2005, p. 15.

Great Controversy Theme

33. Did Christ die only for human beings? Or, for the sinless angels too? (**See Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:9-10; Colossians 1:19-20; Patriarchs and Prophets 68,69; Signs of the Times**, December 30, 1889, par. 4; *Ibid.* December 22, 1914, par. 4-5 [quoted in part in Item #34 below]; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, 1132; *Seventh-day Adventist*

Bible Commentary, vol. 7a, 252; *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 27, 1902, par. 4; *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900, par. 4-6; and *MS 22*, Jan. 10, 1890 [*The EG White 1888 Materials* 569,570].)

What did Jesus Himself mean when He said: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw **everyone** to me”? (John 12:32, *GNB*) Note that *TLB*, *CEV*, *Message*, *Concordant Literal New Testament*, and *The Kingdom Interlinear New Testament* have the word *all*; *The Clear Word Bible* has *people everywhere*; *Phillips*, *RSV*, *GNB*, *NIV*, *Jerusalem*, *Goodspeed*, and *NEB* have *all men*; the earliest Greek manuscripts have a neuter plural form literally *all things* or *everything*. Does this imply more than just human beings? “And I, if I be exalted from the earth, will draw all things to my self.” (*Rheims*, 1582) **The sinless angels did not need any forgiveness. They had not rebelled. What would Christ’s death accomplish for them? Would it bring peace? How does the death of Christ protect the angels for eternity against the hazards of apostasy, defection, hostility, alienation, disunity, and distrust? What did they learn at the cross?**

Ephesians 1:9-10: ⁹Having made known to us the secret of His will, according to His good pleasure, that He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ in regard to the dispensation of the fulness of the times, to bring into one the whole in the Christ, **both the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth—in him.** (*YLT*)

⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ 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. (*NIV*)

¹⁰ ... that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth. (*NJB*)

¹⁰ And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. (*NLT*)

¹⁰ Then when the time is right, God will do all that he has planned, and Christ will bring together everything in heaven and on earth. (*CEV*)

¹⁰ ... that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head. (*NCV*)

In all his wisdom and insight ⁹ God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. ¹⁰ **This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.** (*GNB*)

¹⁰ ... He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which **everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.** (*Message*) [Bold type is added.]

Ephesians 3:9-10: ⁹ And to cause all to see what *is* the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ that **there might be made known now to the principalities and**

the authorities in the heavenly *places*, through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God. (*YLT*)

¹⁰ [The purpose is] that **through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety *and* innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly sphere.** (*Amplified*)

⁹ God, who created everything, wanted me to help everyone understand the mysterious plan that had always been hidden in his mind. ¹⁰ Then **God would use the church to show the powers and authorities in the spiritual world that he has many different kinds of wisdom.** (*CEV*)

¹⁰ He did this so that now, through the church, he could let the rulers and authorities in heaven know his infinite wisdom. (*God's Word*)

¹⁰ **In order that at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.** (*Good News Bible*)

¹⁰**Through Christians like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!** (*The Message*) [Bold type is added; italic type, brackets, and content in brackets are in the original source.]

Colossians 1:19-20: ¹⁹ Because in him it did please all the fulness to tabernacle, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile the all things to himself—having made peace through the blood of his cross—through him, whether the things upon the earth, whether the things in the heavens. (*YLT*)

¹⁹ God was pleased for all of himself to live in Christ. ²⁰ And through Christ, God has brought all things back to himself again—things on earth and things in heaven. God made peace through the blood of Christ's death on the cross. (*NCV*)

²⁰ And God was pleased for him to make peace by sacrificing his blood on the cross, so that all beings in heaven and on earth would be brought back to God. (*CEV*)

²⁰ **God was also pleased to bring everything on earth and in heaven back to himself through Christ. He did this by making peace through Christ's blood sacrificed on the cross.** (*God's Word*)

²⁰ And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (*RSV*)

²⁰ He brought peace to the human race by shedding His blood on the cross, thus uniting heaven and earth. (*Clear Word*)

²⁰ **Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.** (*GNB*)

²⁰ Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross. (*Message*) [Bold type is added.]

Notice that in these passages, some very important aspects of the great controversy are spelled out. 1) The great controversy involves the entire universe. 2) The great controversy was won by what Christ did when He was here on this earth, especially by His death on the cross. 3) God is teaching the angels something about His wisdom and His plan through the church on this earth! (See 1 Peter 1:12.)

The plan of salvation involves the whole universe—not just humans.

34. Through the plan of salvation, a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and result of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. Satan had declared that the law of God was faulty, and that the good of the universe demanded a change in its requirement. In attacking the law, he thought to overthrow the authority of its Author, and gain for himself the supreme allegiance....—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1893, par. 12; *Ibid.* December 22, 1914, par. 4-5; *The Messenger* June 7, 1893, par. 5; *Bible Echoes* July 15, 1893, par. 3. The first portion is in *That I May Know Him* 366.4.

The work of Satan as an accuser began in heaven. This has been his work on earth ever since man's fall, and it will [168] be his work in a special sense as we approach nearer to the close of this world's history. As he sees that his time is short, he will work with greater earnestness to deceive and destroy. He is angry when he sees a people on the earth who, even in their weakness and sinfulness, have respect to the law of Jehovah. He is determined that they shall not obey God. He delights in their unworthiness, and has devices prepared for every soul, that all may be ensnared and separated from God. **He seeks to accuse and condemn God and all who strive to carry out His purposes in this world in mercy and love, in compassion and forgiveness.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 167.1. Compare *5T* 471.1; *RH*, August 6, 1895, par. 11; January 2, 1908, par. 12.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but **it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.** To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me." John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, **but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their**

dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. [Genesis 2:17]—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68.2 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985).

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven.** Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 315; *God's Amazing Grace* 148 (1900).

Who can measure or anticipate the gift of God? For ages sin had interrupted the flow of divine benevolence to man; but God's mercy and love for the fallen race have not ceased to accumulate, nor lost their earthward direction. The inhabitants of the world, their reason perverted, have turned the earth into a lazar-house. But God still lives and reigns, and in Christ He has poured on the world a healing flood. **In the gift of God's dear Son, a definite view of His character has been given to the race that is never absent from His mind. His very heart is laid open in the royal law. That infinite standard is presented to all, that there may be no mistake in regard to that kind of people God would have compose His kingdom. It is only those who are obedient to all His commandments who will become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. These will be honored with a citizenship above, a life that measures with the life of God,—a life without sorrow, pain, or death throughout eternal ages.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, November 17, 1898, par. 8.

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels.... **Not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. [1 Corinthians 4:9] God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which "angels desire to look," [1 Peter 1:12] and it will be their study throughout endless ages.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 19.2 (1898); *Reflecting Christ* 15 (1985).

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, "It is finished," had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory.

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his

rebellion.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 758.2-3 (1898). [Bible references in brackets and bold type are added.]

The security of the universe was even more important than the salvation of man.

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth. By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped.... Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899, par. 2-3; *LHU* 257.2. [Bold type is added.]

Christ died for sinless angels too.

That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven....** The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889, par. 4; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, 1132.9; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7a, 252.4-5; *Our High Calling* 45.4; *The Home Missionary*, May 1, 1897; *TA* 205.3. [Bold type is added.]

The angels also needed the message of the cross.

For centuries God bore with the inhabitants of the old world. But at last guilt reached its limit.... He came out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth, and by a flood cleansed the earth of its iniquity.

Notwithstanding this terrible lesson, men had no sooner begun to multiply once more, than rebellion and vice became widespread. Satan seemed to have taken control of the world. **The time came that a change must be made, or the image of God would be wholly obliterated from the hearts of the beings He had created. All heaven watched the movements of God with intense interest. Would He once more manifest His wrath? Would He destroy the world by fire? The angels thought that the time**

had come to strike the blow of justice, when, lo, to their wondering vision was unveiled the plan of salvation.—Ellen G. White, *Diary*. Battle Creek, Michigan, January 10, 1890; *MS 22*, January 10, 1890; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* 569.2,3-570.0.

For centuries God looked with patience and forbearance upon the cruel treatment given to his ambassadors, at his holy law prostrate, despised, trampled underfoot. He swept away the inhabitants of the Noachian world with a flood. But when the earth was again peopled, men drew away from God, and renewed their hostility to him, manifesting bold defiance. Those whom God rescued from Egyptian bondage followed in the footsteps of those who had preceded them. Cause was followed by effect; the earth was being corrupted.

A crisis had arrived in the government of God.... All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction.

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth....

The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love. To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon himself.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900, par. 4-7; compare *Desire of Ages* 37.

Before Christ's first advent, the sin of refusing to conform to God's law had become widespread. Apparently Satan's power was growing; his warfare against heaven was becoming more and more determined. **A crisis had been reached. With intense interest God's movements were watched by the heavenly angels. Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire or flood to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the vials of wrath upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed. The worlds unfallen would have said, "Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion."**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 27, 1902, par. 4; *Reflecting Christ* 58.4; compare *The Youth's Instructor*, July 29, 1897, par. 8; *That I May Know Him* 19.3. [Bold type is added.]

How do we explain these words about angels? Did they need some help in understanding God and His plan? Why did they think we as a race should be wiped out? How do our sins appear to them? Are we worthy of the death they thought we should get? (Romans 6:23) Are they involved in the great controversy in some way? Where did the great controversy begin? Wasn't it right in heaven next to the throne of God—in the most holy place in heaven? Did the angels have any questions? Surely, the quotations above

should have answered that question! What answers do the sinless angels need to get in the great controversy in order to be secure against “apostasy” and “defection”?

35. What is the Holy Spirit supposed to do for us? (Ephesians 1:13-17) What is the meaning of: “Do not make God’s Holy Spirit sad”? (Ephesians 4:30, *GNB*) Does that mean, “Don’t make Him angry, or He won’t help you”? Or, is it that when we do not allow our heavenly Father to heal us, He grieves because then He knows that He will have to give us up? Would this bring great sorrow to the Spirit of God? Does this have anything to do with the delay in the second coming? (See Revelation 7:1-3.)

Ephesians 1:13-17 (GNB): ¹³ And you also became God’s people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. **You believed** in Christ, and **God put his stamp of ownership [seal]** on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. ¹⁴ **The Spirit is the guarantee** that we shall receive what God has promised his people, and this assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his. Let us praise his glory! ¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I remember you in my prayers ¹⁷ and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you **the Spirit, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know him.**

Ephesians 4:30 (GNB): ³⁰ And do not make God’s Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God’s mark of ownership [seal] on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free.

Revelation 7:1-3 (GNB): ¹ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds so that no wind should blow on the earth or the sea or against any tree. ² And I saw another angel coming up from the east with the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom God had given the power to damage the earth and the sea. ³ The angel said, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees, **until we mark the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.**” [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

What Is the Seal of God?

A Mark Which Angels Read.—[Ephesians 1:13 quoted.] **What is the seal of the living God, which is placed in the foreheads of His people? It is a mark which angels, but not human eyes, can read; for the destroying angel must see this mark of redemption** (*Letter 126*, 1898).—Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161.4.

The angel with the writer’s ink horn is to place a mark upon the foreheads of all who are separated from sin and sinners, and the destroying angel follows this angel (*Letter 12*, 1886).—Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161.5. [Content in brackets is added, indicating Bible verse quoted.]

Seal Is a Settling Into Truth.—Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is **not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot**

be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming. (MS 173, 1902)—Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161.6; “Medical Missionary Work in Southern California,” Interview held in Los Angeles, California, September 15, 1902; 10MR 252.1; “Medical Missionary Work in Southern California,” November 20, 1911; 1MR 249.2; LDE 219.4; FLB 287.7; Mar 200.2; OFC 83.6; OFC 328.2. [Bold type is in the headers in original; other bold type is added.]

These passages suggest that the ultimate work of the Holy Spirit on this earth is to prepare a people to face the final deceptions of Satan by “settling [them] into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually so they cannot be moved.” [Content in brackets is added.] This will be the only safeguard against Satan’s masterful deceptions when he comes as Christ, hoping to deceive the whole world. (Revelation 13:1-8) Notice carefully that this is brought about by our learning about God and getting to know Him. (Ephesians 1:13-17) **The Holy Spirit made this possible by inspiring prophets and apostles to write the Scriptures which have been preserved, copied, and translated for our benefit.**

If we are going to stand through the last great battle in the great controversy, we must become so familiar with the truth about God that not even Satan with all his deceptive capabilities can confuse or deceive us. That is only possible if we are “sealed” and “settled” into the truth.

36. Was there not a dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14) even in heaven among the angels? And what was the issue? **Hasn’t it always been over God’s law?** Is it the fault of the law? Or, a misunderstanding of the law? Haven’t God’s laws been misunderstood as the arbitrary demands of an exacting, unforgiving, and vengeful Deity?

See handout: *Colossians 2:14*.

37. What is it about God that has won us? Isn’t it that He values nothing higher than our freedom? How can God maintain freedom and peace throughout the universe forever? Will He need to use law? Is there any other way to maintain order and harmony? Does Christ’s death on the cross have anything to do with it?

What is the most attractive thing about God as you know Him? Is it the life of Jesus here on this earth? Is it the way He was so patient in the times of the Old Testament? Is it what you have come to know about God through our understanding of the “great controversy” over God’s character and government? Does God’s use of law scare you? Or, do you recognize that every government has to be based on some kind of law?

What are we supposed to learn about God through the life and death of Jesus Christ? Based on our understanding of His use of law, could God get us to recognize that He never asks us to do anything that is not for our best good? Could we get to the place where we do what is right because it is right?

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire

to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 105.2.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness [98] is loyalty to our Redeemer. **This will lead us to do right because it is right**—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 97.3.

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 20*, 1897 (MR # 970); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897, par. 11. Section in brackets is omitted in *That I May Know Him* 120.4; *12MR* 236.1. [Bold type is added.]

38. From whom did the Jews get their misunderstanding of circumcision? Is it possible even to take the seventh-day Sabbath and misunderstand it and turn it into a dividing thing (Ephesians 2:14) rather than a uniting thing? Which “law” has caused the greatest hostility? The *Mishnah*? The ceremonial law? Or, the Ten Commandments? What “divided” heaven? Was it something other than law? Which has caused greater hostility? The ceremonial sabbaths? Or, the seventh-day Sabbath? Was the ceremonial law ever against us? What was the ceremonial law given to teach?

A careful reading of the book of Exodus makes it very clear that God chose the descendants of Abraham—the children of Israel—to be His special people. (Exodus 19:5-6) He placed them at the crossroads of the world of their day. He offered them many special privileges provided they take up special responsibilities and keep His commandments and, thus, represent Him correctly. They immediately claimed the privileges and quickly forgot about the responsibilities. However, there were a few things that they did that set them apart from other people. Circumcising their male children on the eighth day, observing the seventh-day Sabbath, and worshiping in the temple at Jerusalem were primary among those distinguishing marks. In Jesus’s day, the Jewish people felt that practicing these things and a lot of other rules that came along later were proof that they were God’s one chosen people.

But, instead of using God’s Word given to them as a way of spreading the good news about Him to other nations, they put up walls, trying to exclude all other nationalities because they believed that God had chosen only Israel.

39. Read Exodus 23:20-33. The Jews came to understand such passages as evidence that God was their exclusive possession and not for the benefit of anyone else. But, even back in Exodus 23, God made it very clear why they needed to have a clear distinction between themselves and the pagan Gentiles around them.

Exodus 23:32-33 (GNB): ³² “Do not make any agreement with them or with their gods. ³³ Do not let those people live in your country; if you do, they will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, it will be a fatal trap for you.”

A similar message was presented at the end of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Read Deuteronomy 20:10-18. The message to kill everyone in the captured territories seems very harsh; but, notice, once again, the reason stated by Moses as he was relating God’s instructions in verse 18 (GNB):

“Kill them, so that they will not make you sin against the Lord by teaching you to do all the disgusting things that they do in the worship of their gods.”

History proved that God was right. The children of Israel did not completely chase out or destroy the foreign nations that were living in Palestine. And almost immediately, the children of Israel became attracted to their fertility cult and pagan religious practices. They seemed to have forgotten why it was that God wanted them to keep themselves separate from the pagan nations.

In more recent times, especially since the times of Jesus, the Jews have been distinguished by their worshiping on the seventh-day Sabbath. Satan, recognizing how important a correct understanding of worship on the Sabbath could be, has done everything possible to confuse people’s understanding about why we should keep the seventh-day Sabbath. A few Christian denominations in recent times—most particularly the Seventh-day Adventist Church—after carefully studying Scripture have adopted, once again, the seventh-day Sabbath. But, this keeping of the Sabbath according to the moral law has caused far more conflicts than has keeping of the *Mishnah*, or the ceremonial law.

The ceremonial law was designed with types and symbols to look forward to the coming of the Messiah and His sacrificial death. Only the Jewish people carefully followed the ceremonies as spelled out in Scripture, and even they did so only sporadically.

Today, as we seek to convince others of the truth of the Bible as we understand it, Sabbathkeeping tends to be one of the main barriers against people’s accepting our message. Why is that? Almost universally, it is because people do not want to spend 24 hours in religious worship. It is not so much that they prefer Sunday as a day of worship to Saturday as a day of worship but rather that they find it difficult enough to give one or two hours to religious services once a week and cannot bring themselves to dedicate a full 24 hours for that purpose.

40. Are we free at any time to judge others about matters in the *Mishnah*? The ceremonial law? The Ten Commandment law? (See Romans 14; *The Mount of Blessings* 123,124.)

Compare Ephesians 2:14 and Colossians 2:14 with Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. For example, if we feel that we are justified in our observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, does that give us the right to judge others who do not observe it? Would we accept the idea that Jews are free to judge us because we do not observe all the detailed rules in the *Mishnah* or even observe the Old Testament ceremonial regulations? None of us has been appointed by God to serve as a judge of others.

41. Is the church built on Peter? (See Matthew 16:18; compare **Ephesians 2:19-22**.) Didn’t even Peter recognize that Jesus was the “Chief Cornerstone”? (1 Peter 2:4-8)

Based on Matthew 16:15-20, the Roman Catholic Church claims that Christ at that time appointed Peter as the head of the Christian church. They believe that those symbolic keys

have been handed down from Peter to every subsequent pope up to the present time. Thus, they believe that one must be baptized as a member of the Roman Catholic Church in order to be saved.

Protestants including Seventh-day Adventists have pointed out that the two words for *rock* in Matthew 16:18 are different. Peter is described as a small rolling stone (*petros*); but, the rock foundation (*petra*) on which Christ builds His church is something else—either Christ Himself or the truth about Christ Himself as presented in Scripture.

So, did Jesus give the keys to the future Christian church to Peter? It is very interesting to notice that in Matthew 18:18-20 Jesus gave those same instructions to all of the disciples. Did He also give the keys to the church to all the disciples? Does that apply even to two or three future Christians who are gathered together in His name? (Matthew 18:19-20)

But, a better answer to the Roman Catholic claim is found in Ephesians 2:19-22. Paul was making it clear that even Gentiles have now become members of God's family. That includes us because he made it clear that "You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself." (Ephesians 2:20, *GNB*) So, it is true that the church is built on the work of the apostles and prophets including Peter. That work is primarily through the giving of the Scriptures. But, every faithful Christian is supposed to be a stone or a brick in the church which is to be built up as a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord.

Peter himself recognized this in 1 Peter 2:4-8. Peter was referring back to passages such as Isaiah 8:14-15; 28:16; and Psalm 118:22-23 which Jesus applied to Himself. (Matthew 21:42) Notice that even the chief priests and Pharisees hearing Jesus's parable knew He was talking about Himself and about them when He spoke of a stone that would crush them.

42. Read Ephesians 1:15 and 3:2. Why did Paul say these things?

Ephesians 1:15 (*GNB*): ¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people....

Ephesians 3:2 (*GNB*): ² Surely you have heard that God in his grace has given me this work to do for your good.

How could Paul write such words to his close friends that he had lived with and worked with for 3 years?

These are two of the key verses which suggest that this letter was not written solely to the church at Ephesus but rather was intended as a circular letter to be read and then passed on to each of the churches in Asia Minor.

43. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. What was Paul trying to say in this short prayer?

Paul was giving a marvelous doxology or prayer of thanksgiving for what God had done for the "saints" in Asia Minor. It was even hard for Paul to find words to express what he wanted to say. Remember that thirty years later when inspiring John to write the book of Revelation, God gave high praise for the early church at Ephesus. (Revelation 2:1-7)

44. Does being forgiven or justified make one safe to live next door to for eternity? What is God's ultimate goal for each one of us? (See **Ephesians 4:11-16**; compare Hebrews 5:11-6:3.) How does the church contribute to this? How do you reconcile Matthew 18:2-4; 1

Corinthians 13:11; and Ephesians 4:13-14? Does real spiritual maturity lead to “the unity that is inherent in our faith”?

This may be the most important passage in the book of Ephesians. What is God’s plan for us as Christians? Matthew 18:1-4 seems to suggest that the ideal for Christians is to be childlike. What is the most important characteristic of a healthy child? It is his capacity to grow: Physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. If a child fails to grow physically, we are very concerned. If a child fails to grow mentally, we become truly alarmed. If a child fails to grow socially, we pity him. But, if a child fails to grow spiritually, is that a blessing?

Ephesians 4:11-16 and Hebrews 5:11-6:3 make it very clear that God intends for Christians to grow up spiritually. What is God waiting for?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 173*, 1902; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161.6; *LDE* 219.4; *Maranatha* 200.2; *FLB* 287.7; *OFC* 83.6; *OFC* 328.2; *1MR* 249.2-250.0; *10MR* 252.1.

God will not allow Satan to have full sway on this earth until God’s faithful people are “sealed” and cannot be moved by Satan’s temptations or deceptions. (See Revelation 7:1-3; compare Ezekiel 9.)

God needs a people who really care about their relationship with Him and focus on the Bible study, prayer, and witnessing that will be required to prepare them for the final showdown. These people, known as the 144,000, (See GC 648,649.) will be God’s last marvelous messengers to the world. They will not be afraid to speak the truth to anyone. In fact, they will be expected to speak the truth to the whole world at a time when faith is almost non-existent here on earth. (Luke 18:8) This group of people will keep God’s commandments as they were intended to be kept and bear testimony to God as did the apostles and prophets. (Revelation 12:17; 19:10)

Such a group of people will naturally come together as suggested by the *New English Bible* translation of Ephesians 4:13:

So shall we all at last attain to the ***unity inherent in our faith*** and our knowledge of the Son of God.... [Bold type and italic type are added.]

A number of research studies have determined that for a person to become a member of a church and remain there permanently, s/he must experience at least two of the following three things:

- 1) **Be reasonably convinced that their doctrines and teachings are correct.**
- 2) **Make real friends among the members. Does this mean being socially involved, even eating together?**
- 3) **Get involved in church activities.**

What was Paul suggesting when he said that there is a “unity inherent in our faith”? Remember that the early Christians could not build any church buildings; they had to worship in members homes. How do you think that would affect our fellowship and involvement in church activities?

45. Is it the purpose of the cross to say: “Take Me seriously; I mean it when I say: ‘If you break the rules, I’ll kill you as I’ve killed My Son’”? How could looking at Jesus dying on the cross make me want to love God? Can you really have unity, peace, and harmony in the family—unity that is “inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God” (**Ephesians 4:13, NEB**) if we are all afraid? Don’t we have to eliminate fear first? (1 John 4:18) How does the cross eliminate fear? Does the cross tell us something about law and the God who has made so much use of law? And about what the real violation of the law is?

Unfortunately, it was the practice of the dominant Christian church through the Dark Ages to threaten people if they did not do what the church told them to do. In effect, the message was: “If you do not do what we tell you to do, God will throw you into hell and burn you forever!” Would such a message bring peace and harmony? Would it eliminate fear? Just the opposite!

Stated in the briefest possible terms, the life and death of Jesus give us a choice: 1) We can see the inherent advantages of living a Christlike life and do our best with the help of the Holy Spirit to follow His example; or, 2) We will die the death which He died which is the natural consequence of persisting in sin and thus separating ourselves from the Source of Life. (Isaiah 59:2) God is not out to get us! But, ultimately, if we persist in it, sin will separate us from Him and, thus, doom us to death. Does understanding the truth of these natural consequences help to eliminate fear? **We should be afraid of sin and not afraid of God!**

Down through the centuries, God has given us many laws to obey. Understood correctly in their original context, every one of those laws was given for our best good. The purpose of those laws was not to threaten us in case we disobeyed; instead, they were given to show us how to live the best possible kinds of lives in obedience. When we understand all of this, we come to love and appreciate the One who did His best to protect us in our ignorance and immaturity. And if there are some commands from God that we still do not fully understand, we will follow His commands as far as possible, recognizing that when we do come to understand them, we will once again discover that they are for our best good.

46. Why did Paul say: “Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit”? (**Ephesians 5:18, GNB**) What does the Holy Spirit have to do with alcoholic “spirits”? (Compare 2 Timothy 5:23.)

Paul knew that it was the custom among the pagan religions in Ephesus and especially in the worship of Artemis/Diana at the famous temple for people to get drunk at the worship services. That drinking was associated with every kind of abuse, sexual perversion, and promiscuity. Paul recognized that drinking that kind of “spirits” would result in the Christian church seeming to be nothing more than another pagan religion.

Therefore, Paul advised that Christians should live sober lives, doing their best to follow God’s will and demonstrating in their worship services that Christianity was totally different from the religions with which they were familiar. More than that, Paul recognized that alcohol deadens our sensibilities and weakens the mind. This is just the opposite of what Christians should be striving for.

47. What kind of relationship does God want in marriage? If we each treated our spouse as suggested by **Ephesians 5:21-33**, what would be the result? Why is that so hard to do? Or, is it?

There is considerable controversy about what the teaching of the Bible is on the subject of marriage. Adam was given one wife who was to be his equal. (Genesis 2:23-24; 3:16) When sin entered, it led to Eve being placed in a position in subjection to Adam. But, God's original ideal was clear.

As we read through the Bible, we find numerous examples of men, even patriarchs, with more than one wife. Consider Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, etc. This arrangement always led to problems! But, God seemed to work with those men and "wink" at their marital problems. There is no text in the Bible that advises or recommends polygamy.

But, a more practical question for us is: How is each of us to treat the spouse that we have today? Are wives to submit to whatever their husbands demand or ask for? Is the husband's will always to hold sway? This passage in Ephesians is probably the most often quoted passage at marriage ceremonies. Notice that it begins by commanding husbands **and** wives to submit themselves to each other because of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21) How is a wife to submit herself to her husband "as to the Lord"? Is God arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe to all of us, including women? If not, then husbands should not be! Does Jesus ask the church to totally submit its will to Him? On the contrary, Jesus died for the church! These words were written at a time when it was becoming popular to believe that celibacy was the best way to dedicate one's self to God. It was thought that anything that brought any degree of pleasure to the body must be bad for the soul! Thus, if one looks at the oldest drawings or pictures of Christ or Christians, s/he will note that they are so emaciated as to look almost dead. This is based on the idea that if one was really dedicated to one's spiritual health, even to eat was something that one did only enough to sustain life.

Many have thought that this was the kind of life that Paul lived. (See 1 Corinthians 7.) But, Paul clearly recognized the sanctity of human marriage. However, he also realized that in a day when people were being killed for their faith and it was believed that Christ would return very soon, it might be best not to marry.

To better understand what a revolutionary idea Paul's message about marriage was, we must get some idea of what people thought about marriage in Paul's day. **Remember that in order to best understand any form of communication, we need to understand the context in which it was written.** Then, let us consider the status of marriage in Paul's day. Consider the following from William Barclay.

No one reading this passage in the twentieth century can fully realize how great it is. Throughout the years the Christian view of marriage has come to be widely accepted. It still is recognized as the ideal by the majority even in these permissive days. Even where practice has fallen short of that ideal, it has always been in the minds and hearts of men who live in a Christian situation. Marriage is regarded as the perfect union of body, mind and spirit between a man and a woman. But things were very different when Paul wrote. In this passage Paul is setting forth an ideal which shone with a radiant purity in an immoral world....

Let us look briefly at the situation against which Paul wrote this passage.

The Jews had a low view of women. In his morning prayer there was a sentence in which a Jewish man gave thanks that God had not made him "a

Gentile, a slave or a woman.” [Compare Galatians 3:28.] In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely her husband’s possession to do with as he willed.

In theory the Jew had the highest ideal of marriage. The Rabbis had their sayings. “Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery.” “The very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth.” But the fact was that by Paul’s day, divorce had become tragically easy.

The law of divorce is summarized in *Deuteronomy 24:1*. “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house.” [Compare Numbers 5:12,28; Deuteronomy 22:13-21.] Obviously everything turns on the interpretation of *some indecency*. The stricter Rabbis, headed by the famous Shammai, held that the phrase meant adultery and adultery alone, and declared that even if a wife was as mischievous as Jezebel a husband might not divorce her except for adultery. The more liberal Rabbis, headed by the equally famous Hillel, interpreted the phrase in the widest possible way. They said that it meant that a man might divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt in his food, if she walked in public with her head uncovered, if she talked with men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband’s parents in her husband’s hearing, if she was a brawling woman, if she was troublesome or quarrelsome. A certain Rabbi Akiba interpreted the phrase *if she finds no favour in his eyes* to mean that a husband might divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he considered more attractive. It is easy to see which school of thought would predominate.

Two facts in Jewish law made the matter worse. First, the wife had no rights of divorce at all, unless her husband became a leper or an apostate or engaged in a disgusting trade. Broadly speaking, a husband, under Jewish law, could divorce his wife for any cause; a wife could divorce her husband for no cause. Second, the process of divorce was disastrously easy. The Mosaic law said that a man who wished a divorce had to hand his wife a bill of divorcement which said, “Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt.” All a man had to do was to hand that bill of divorcement, correctly written out by a Rabbi, to his wife in the presence of two witnesses and the divorce was complete. The only other condition was that the woman’s dowry must be returned.

At the time of Christ’s coming the marriage bond was in peril even among the Jews, so much so that the very institution of marriage was threatened since Jewish girls were refusing to marry because their position as wife was so uncertain.

THE situation was worse in the Greek world. Prostitution was an essential part of Greek life. Demosthenes had laid it down as the accepted rule of life: “We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children

legitimately and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs.” The woman of the respectable classes in Greece led a completely secluded life. She took no part in public life; she never appeared on the streets alone; she never even appeared at meals or at social occasions; she had her own apartments and none but her husband might enter into them. It was the aim that, as Xenophon had it, “she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible.”

The Greek respectable woman was brought up in such a way that companionship and fellowship in marriage was impossible. Socrates said: “Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife—and is there anyone to whom you talk less?” Versus was the imperial colleague of the great Marcus Aurelius. He was blamed by his wife for associating with other women, and his answer was that she must remember that the name of wife was a title of dignity but not of pleasure. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere.

To make matters worse, there was no legal procedure of divorce in Greece. As someone has put it, divorce was by nothing else than caprice. **The one security that the wife had was that her dowry must be returned.** Home and family life were near to being extinct and fidelity was completely non-existent.

In Rome the matter was still worse; its degeneracy was tragic. For the first five hundred years of the Roman Republic there had been not one single case of divorce. The first recorded divorce was that of Spurius Carvilius Ruga in 234 B.C. But at the time of Paul, Roman family life was wrecked. Seneca writes that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. In Rome the Romans did not commonly date their years by numbers; they called them by the names of the consuls; Seneca says that women dated the years by the names of their husbands. Martial tells of a woman who had had ten husbands; Juvenal tells of one who had had eight husbands in five years; Jerome declares it to be true that in Rome there was a woman who was married to her twenty-third husband and she herself was his twenty-first wife. We find a Roman Emperor Augustus demanding that her husband should divorce the lady Livia when she was with child that he might himself marry her. We find even Cicero, in his old age, putting away his wife Terentia that he might marry a young heiress, whose trustee he was, that he might enter into her estate in order to pay his debts.

That is not to say that there was no such thing as fidelity. Suetonius tells of a Roman lady called Mallonia who committed suicide rather than submit to the favours of Tiberius the Emperor. But it is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere was adulterous. The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown.

It is against this background that Paul writes. When he wrote this lovely passage he was not stating the view that every man held. He was calling men and women to a new purity and a new fellowship in the married life. It is impossible to exaggerate the cleansing effect that Christianity had on

home life in the ancient world and the benefits it brought to women.—William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* comments on Ephesians 5:21-33. [Italic type is in original; bold type and content in brackets are added.]

If every Christian marriage was of the quality suggested by Ephesians 5:21-33, the world would be beating down the doors of churches to find out what their secret is! But, alas, Christians are not a lot better at marriage than are non-Christians.

Let us avoid several obvious mistakes when talking about Christian marriage: 1) Do not assume that because someone is apparently blessed by God, that this means that everything that person does is right! 2) God does not change, and neither do His ideals—He would still like to see us married to a single spouse and treating each other as equals. The more we are able to overcome sin—which was the problem in the first place—the closer we should be able to approach to God’s original ideal.

In order to understand any culturally determined material in the Bible, we must discover, as far as possible, what things were like at the time. Those include: 1) A well-known Jewish male prayer said upon arising each morning was: “I thank you, Lord, that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” (Compare Galatians 3:28.) 2) Immorality was considered an important part of many religions! 3) Jesus’s disciples even questioned the advisability of considering marriage if one was expected to remain with that same woman for the rest of one’s life! (Matthew 19:10) 4) A few years later, people who considered themselves saints traveled around the Mediterranean world separating husbands from their wives, believing that they were doing God’s will! But, remember that soon after the return to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah separated Jewish husbands from pagan wives.

There is a famous 1549 printing of the *Matthew’s Bible* (This is a pseudonym because he did not want to be killed like Tyndale was!) or *John Rogers’ Bible*. (He was actually a close friend of Tyndale, and John Rogers was his real name.) The New Testament was translated by Tyndale and the Old Testament from Genesis through 1 Chronicles was by Tyndale; the rest was done by Coverdale. It was originally published in 1537 and later edited with notes by Edmund Becke. The famous note by Becke at the end of 1 Peter 3 is copied as near as possible to the original spellings! The endnote for 1 Peter 3 reads:

He dwelleth wyth his wyfe accordinge to knowledge that taketh her as a necessarye healer, and not as a bonde seruante or a bonde slave. And yf she be not obedient and healfull unto hym endeuoureth to beate the feare of God into her heade, that therby she maye be compelled to learne her duitie and do it.

Does this sound like something that should be read at weddings—especially after asking the wife to promise to obey? Why do so many brides feel that *obey* should be left out of her vows? Might brides leave if they had that note from the *Matthew’s Bible* read to them?

48. Paul also spoke quite plainly about how parents should treat their children and how the children should respect their parents. (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21)

Once again, it will be useful to understand the culture and context for this advice. Consider this written by William Barclay.

If the Christian faith did much for women, it did even more for children. In Roman civilization contemporary with Paul there existed certain features which made life perilous for the child.

(i) There was the Roman *patria potestas*, the father's power. Under the *patria potestas* a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could punish as he liked and could even inflict the death penalty. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. Even when he was a grown man, even if he were a magistrate of the city, even if the state had crowned him with well-deserved honours, he remained within his father's absolute power. "The great mistake," writes Becker, "consisted in the Roman father considering the power which Nature imposes as a duty on the elders, of guiding and protecting a child during infancy, as extending over his freedom, involving his life and death, and continuing over his entire existence." It is true that the father's power was seldom carried to its limits, because public opinion would not have allowed it, but the fact remains that in the time of Paul the child was absolutely in his father's power.

(ii) There was the custom of child exposure. When a child was born, it was placed before its father's feet, and, if the father stooped and lifted the child, that meant that he acknowledged it and wished it to be kept. If he turned and walked away, it meant that he refused to acknowledge it and the child could quite literally be thrown out.

There is a letter whose date is 1 B.C. from a man called Hilarion to his wife Alis. He has gone to Alexandria and he writes home on domestic affairs:

"Hilarion to Alis his wife heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonaron. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If—good luck to you!—you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out. You told Aphrodisias to tell me: 'Do not forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry."

It is a strange letter, so full of affection and yet so callous towards the child who may be born.

A Roman baby always ran the risk of being repudiated and exposed. In the time of Paul that risk was even greater. We have seen how the marriage bond had collapsed and how men and women changed their partners with bewildering rapidity. Under such circumstances a child was a misfortune. So few children were born that the Roman government actually passed legislation that the amount of any legacy that a childless couple could receive was limited. Unwanted children were commonly left in the Roman forum. There they became the property of anyone who cared to pick them up. They were collected at nights by people who nourished them in order to sell them as slaves or to stock the brothels of Rome.

(iii) Ancient civilization was merciless to the sickly or deformed child. Seneca writes, "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and

deformed we drown.” The child who was a weakling or imperfectly formed had little hope of survival.

It was against this situation that Paul wrote his advice to children and parents. If ever we are asked what good Christianity has done to the world, we need but point to the change effected in the status of women and of children.—William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* - comments on Ephesians 6:1-4. [Italic type is in the original.]

49. Why didn't Paul condemn slavery? (See Ephesians 6:5-9; compare 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; Philemon.)

See ***Philemon Teacher's Guide*** Item #2 & #3; ***1&2 Timothy Teacher's Guide*** Item #13; ***1&2 Corinthians Teacher's Guide*** Item #10; ***Deuteronomy Teacher's Guide*** (Classic Version) Item #12; ***General Principles*** Item #8. Each can be found in the section "Teacher's Guides" at www.theox.org.

In the society in which Paul lived, an estimated sixty percent of the population was in slavery. Slavery, however, was not a thing determined by race and lasting for a lifetime. Often, people sold themselves or their children into slavery for a defined period of time to pay their debts. Others became "slaves" for religious reasons. Daughters were dedicated to becoming "temple virgins" much as a young girl might become a nun in our day. Some slaves were very highly trusted members of the household. Paul felt that slavery was absolutely contrary to Christianity. (See Galatians 3:26-29.) But, he recognized that if the infant Christian church tried to openly attack this societal norm, they would be destroyed before they could do anything! In Paul's mind, no doubt, the fastest way to eliminate slavery was to hasten the second coming of Jesus. Paul was not ignoring this problem; he just decided to deal with it in the most efficient way he knew of—to spread the gospel!

When Paul wrote to slaves in the Christian church, he must have been writing to a very large number. William Barclay wrote:

It has been computed that in the Roman Empire there were 60,000,000 slaves. In Paul's day a kind of terrible idleness had fallen on the citizens of Rome. Rome was the mistress of the world, and therefore it was beneath the dignity of a Roman citizen to work. Practically all work was done by slaves. Even doctors and teachers, even the closest friends of the Emperors, their secretaries who dealt with letters and appeals and finance, were slaves.

Often there were bonds of the deepest loyalty and affection between master and slave. Pliny writes to a friend that he is deeply affected because some of his well-loved slaves have died. He has two consolations, although they are not enough to comfort his grief. "I have always very readily manumitted my slaves (for their death does not seem altogether untimely, if they have lived long enough to receive their freedom); the other, that I have allowed them to make a kind of will, which I observe as rigidly as if it were good in law." There the kindly master speaks.

But basically the life of the slave was grim and terrible. In law he was not a person but a *thing*. Aristotle lays it down that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for they have nothing in common; "for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." Varro, writing on agriculture, divides agricultural instruments into three classes—the articulate, the

inarticulate and the mute. The articulate comprises the slaves; the inarticulate the cattle; and the mute the vehicles. The slave is no better than a beast who happens to be able to talk. Cato gives advice to a man taking over a farm. He must go over it and throw out everything that is past its work; and old slaves too must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations.

The law was quite clear. Gaius, the Roman lawyer, in the *Institutes* lays it down: "We may note that it is universally accepted over the slave." If the slave ran away, at best he was branded on the forehead with the letter F for *fugitivus*, which means runaway, at worst he was killed. The terror of the slave was that he was absolutely at the caprice of his master. Augustus crucified a slave because he killed a pet quail. Vedius Pollio flung a slave still living to the savage lampreys in his fish pond because he dropped and broke a crystal goblet. Juvenal tells of a Roman matron who ordered a slave to be killed for no other reason than that she lost her temper with him. When her husband protested, she said: "You call a slave a man, do you? He has done no wrong, you say? Be it so; it is my will and my command; let my will be the voucher for the deed." The slaves who were maids to their mistresses often had their hair torn out and their cheeks torn with their mistresses' nails. Juvenal tells of the master "who delights in the sound of a cruel flogging thinking it sweeter than any siren's song," or "who revels in clanking chains," or, "who summons a torturer and brands the slave because a couple of towels are lost." A Roman writer lays it down: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law."

It is against this terrible background that Paul's advice to slaves has to be read.—William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* - article on Ephesians 6:5-9. [Italic type is in the original.]

50. We believe that Christ is One with the Father, and that He has no beginning. Why then would Paul call Him the "first-born Son"? (See **Colossians 1:15**; the same Greek word is used in Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6; and Revelation 1:5.) Is it really important that we believe that Christ was *fully* God? Why? Was there ever a time when Christ was "born"? (**John 1:1-3**; **Colossians 1:18**) What could it mean to be "firstborn from the dead"?

The word *prototokos* here translated as *first-born* means "the preeminent or ranking member of the group." Consider this.

There has been much discussion throughout the centuries as to the meaning of *prototokos* in Col[ossians]. 1:15. The early Church Fathers applied the expression to Christ as the eternal Son of God. The Arians used this verse to show that Christ Himself was a created being. Such an interpretation, though possible as far as the grammar of the passage is concerned, is elsewhere contradicted in Scripture (see on Additional Note in John 1). The passage may be understood in a way that brings it wholly in harmony with the general teaching of Scripture. This accords with sound principles of scriptural exegesis.

In Heb[rews]. 1:6 *prototokos* clearly refers to the incarnation, and some have tried to make the same application in Col[ossians]. 1:15. Others believe that

in Colossians Paul is referring to the resurrection (see on Acts 13:33). However, neither interpretation fits the context, for Christ is here presented as the Creator (cf. Col[ossians]. 1:16), and as preceding creation (cf. on John 1:1–3, 14).

It seems best, therefore, to regard *prototokos* as a figurative expression describing Jesus Christ as first in rank, the figure being drawn from the dignity and office held by the first-born in a human family, or, more precisely, the first-born in a royal family. Christ's position is unique, authoritative, and absolute. He has been entrusted with all prerogatives and authority in heaven and earth. Paul emphasizes the position of Christ because he is seeking to meet the arguments of the false teachers, who declared that Christ was created, and who denied His supremacy.—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (electronic version) comments on *Firstborn* in Colossians 1:15 (vol. 7, 191). Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Content in brackets is added.]

51. Who is the Creator of the universe? (See Genesis 1:1-27; Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalms 33:6,9; 148:5; Proverbs 8:22; Isaiah 40:26-28; 42:5; 43:1,7; 45:12,18; Ezekiel 28:15; Malachi 2:10; **John 1:1-4,11; Colossians 1:15-18; Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 1:2; 11:3; Revelation 10:6.**)

In light of the above biblical passages, it should be clear that the Christ who came down and lived among us as a human being was the Son who created all things. The passages in bold type are particularly relevant to this issue.

52. Ellen White suggested that the central issue in the great controversy is the truth about God's character and His law. (See *Signs of the Times*, December 22, 1914, par. 4 as quoted in the first paragraph of Item #34 above.) Is this a question of whether or not we are going to obey the law? Or, is it a question of what kind of God would make such use of law? And why? How could the cross make peace among the angels? (**Colossians 1:19-20**; 1 Peter 1:12) Did the angels need a clarification of God's use of law and the quality of life that He wants in His universe? Did the loyal beings need understanding?

Before this world was created, all the beings in the universe lived together in peace and harmony. However, sin began in heaven in the mind of Lucifer the covering cherub while in his position next to the throne of God. Over a period of time, he fomented dissent among the angels until there was "war" in heaven. (Revelation 12:7) A majority of the angels remained loyal to God while about one-third joined Lucifer's/Satan's side. While we do not know what Lucifer/Satan said to the angels, it must have been incredibly deceptive and believable to get one-third of those intelligent beings to rebel while living in God's very presence. Don't you think that even the loyal angels had some questions left in their minds? How were those questions to be answered? How were those accusations to be dealt with?

It was not until the death of Jesus on the cross and the opportunity to see Satan unmasked in his attacks on Jesus that the loyal angels were completely clear about his true character and motives. But, even then, there were some questions remaining which will not be answered fully and completely before the end of the great controversy.

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this.
Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin,

they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.

But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law.

Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; for **though they did not then understand all**, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. **Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished."**—Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* 764.2-4. [Bold type is added.]

We usually think of the angels as beings with such supreme intelligence, living in the very presence of God. They can or could ask any question to clarify any issue that came up. We assume that certainly, they could not be deceived while living in heaven! But, many were. If that same Satan is going to be allowed to do his worst on us at the end of this world's history, what should we be doing to get ready? Is it any wonder that God refuses to let Satan attack and deceive us before we are ready? (2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:1-3) God cannot finish the great controversy until all questions have been answered and all accusations have been refuted in the minds of every being who has ever lived—even Satan. (See Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11.)

53. What is the "handwriting of ordinances" that was "against us" which was nailed to the cross? (**Colossians 2:14**) When we read about the law in Romans 13:8,10, (Compare Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37.) all it asks for is love. How could love and liberty (James 1:25) bring enmity? Were the Ten Commandments terminated at the cross? How would eliminating or removing the Jewish traditions make peace among the angels? (**Colossians 1:19-20**) How could that bring reunification throughout the universe? Do the Ten Commandments limit our freedom? Is the cross meant to be the end of the Ten Commandments? Do the Ten Commandments still have authority? Could you show that? Did the death of Jesus on the cross do away with the Sabbath? Do any of these passages suggest that at any time in history people could be saved by keeping the law? Is there a difference between "the handwriting of ordinances," (**Colossians 2:14**) the "Jewish law," (**Ephesians 2:15-16**) and "the Law"? (**Galatians 3:19-25**) Do these passages refer to the moral law (the Ten Commandments)? The ceremonial law? Or, all the laws that were added that were not in the Old Testament (the *Mishnah*)? How would we explain the reference to the new moons, sabbaths, and the questions of food and drink? Does "the law" still have a function in our day?

See handout: **Colossians 2:14.**

54. What happened to the letter to the Laodiceans? (See **Colossians 4:16-17.**) Note that the three cities—Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea—were located very close together. (See Colossians 2:1; 4:13,15-17. Most of those verses are quoted in Item #15 above.) Who was Archippus? (Colossians 4:17; Philemon 2) Notice also that the whole letter of Philemon was about Onesimus. Compare Colossians 4:9.

Philemon 1-2 (GNB): To our friend and fellow worker Philemon,² and the church that meets in your house, and our sister Apphia, and **our fellow soldier Archippus....**

Colossians 4:15-17 (GNB):

¹⁵ Give our best wishes to the believers in Laodicea and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house.

¹⁶ After you read this letter, make sure that it is read also in **the church at Laodicea**. At the same time, you are to **read the letter that the believers in Laodicea will send you**.

¹⁷ And tell **Archippus**, “Be sure to finish the task you were given in the Lord’s service.” [Bold type is added.]

Some scholars think that Archippus was the son of Philemon and Apphia and that he had decided to work like Paul to spread the gospel. That would fit with the idea that the short letter to Philemon is the missing letter to the Laodiceans. If it was Paul’s plan that the letter to Philemon be passed around to different churches to be read, that would have put additional pressure on Philemon to do as Paul had suggested in his letter to him. See Teacher’s Guide for Philemon at www.theox.org.

55. What was the real issue in **Colossians 2:16-23**? Compare Galatians 4:10-11. Was this about Sabbath observance? Keeping the rules? Similar issues? Or, is it about judging others?

As in Romans 14, this passage was aimed at those who think it is their job to judge all others around them. Paul must have been very sensitive to this issue, not only because of the criticisms that had come from the Judaizers in places like Galatia, but also because Paul had once been a Pharisee himself. Pharisees had developed the art of judging others to a fine science!

56. What would happen to social class distinctions if we all practiced what is suggested in **Colossians 3:11 and Galatians 3:28**?

Paul wanted the Christian gospel to be the great “leveler.” While he recognized that it would not be possible to change all the social distinctions in society, he believed that in the church none of those distinctions should matter at all. This is certainly strongly suggested by his arguments in the tiny letter to Philemon.

© 1998-2017, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged.

info@theox.org

Last Modified: January 21, 2017

Z:\My Documents\WP\HTML Docs\TG-HTML\TG-Edited-Logos\EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS\Stg-Fin+-2017_01_22.wpd

The Mamertine Prison in Rome where Paul and Peter were imprisoned.

