

Contents

*Ephesians:
The Gospel of Relationships*

1. The Church at Ephesus (September 24-30)	4
2. Ephesians: Themes in Relationships (October 1-7)	12
3. What God Has Done (October 8-14)	20
4. Praise and Prayer (October 15-21)	28
5. The Church: God’s Workmanship (Project) (October 22-28)	36
6. The Church Without Walls (October 29–November 4)	44
7. God’s Mystery: The United Fellowship (November 5-11)	52
8. Unity Within Differences (November 12-18)	59
9. Living the New Life (November 19-25)	67
10. The Christian Walk (November 26–December 2)	74
11. Christian Relationships (December 3-9)	81
12. The Christian Warfare (War) (December 10-16)	89
13. The Christian Armor (December 17-23)	97
14. The Christian Conversation and Actions (December 24-30)	105

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Introduction

Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships¹

“We shall now separate for foot-washing service,” the preacher announced. Members started walking to the rooms where the services would be held. Men went to the right, and women went to the left. Worshipers chose their partners as they made their way to the basins of water.

One man in the back of the church waited quietly. He had come late and had sat on the floor. He had listened carefully to the sermon, and had taken seriously the invitation for all who had accepted Jesus to take part in the foot-washing service. But he was new to the church. No one knew him. So he eagerly waited for someone to invite him to be a partner. But he looked like he was from a very poor part of society. He seemed hopeless to himself and embarrassing to the saints in that small church in a small town in India where having a high position in society was important.

Which of the saints would offer to be the partner for this lonely visitor? The church elders were busy. The deacons were busy, too. Then suddenly Ravi Anandan went to the visitor, then walked with the visitor to a basin of water. Ravi knelt on the cold concrete floor. He gently held the visitor’s shoeless, dusty feet and washed them in the clear cool water. The water quickly turned a muddy brown.

One month ago Ravi would not have let this visitor come near him. But now he was washing the visitor’s feet! What caused this wonderful change in Ravi’s heart? What made Ravi pull down the wall of hate between rich and poor and show the visitor his love? The answer is in the following verses: “Before you believed in Christ, you were separated from him. You were not considered to be citizens of Israel. You were not included in what the covenants promised. You were without hope and without God in the world. At one time you were far away from God. But now you belong to Christ Jesus. He spilled his blood for you. That has brought you near to God. Christ himself is our peace. He has made Jews and non-Jews into one group of people. He has destroyed the hatred that was like a wall between us. Through his body on the cross, Christ put an end to the laws with all its commands and rules. He wanted to create one new group of people out of the two. He wanted to make peace between them. He planned to bring both of them as one body back to God because of the cross. Christ put their hatred to death on that cross” (Ephesians 2:12-16, NIV).

One month ago, Ravi accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Ravi studied the New Testament. He was deeply touched by the picture of the broken wall in

¹relationships—the connections we have with other people.

Ephesians 2:12-16. He knew that to be a Christian, he must let that wall come down in his life. A wall or Jesus? It had to be a wall or Jesus. It could not be both. This is because Jesus came to tear down all the walls that cause so much hate, misunderstanding, and suffering. Ravi chose Jesus over those walls. Now Ravi could reach out and touch people who were not nice to touch.

That newness makes the Epistle (Letter) to the Ephesians a gospel of new relationships. Ephesians was John Calvin's² favorite letter. William Barclay, a famous Christian writer, calls Ephesians "the queen of epistles." Charles Dodd thinks it is Paul's greatest letter. E. J. Goodspeed finds Ephesians "sweet music of the Christian salvation."—Adapted.

We can use Ephesians to learn about God, religion, or doctrines.³ But two things we cannot miss in Ephesians are: (1) Paul's confidence (faith) in the new creation God has done through Christ and (2) this creation's victory in the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). Ephesians opens with God's choice of us as His people "before the foundation [beginning] of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Ephesians closes with the battle "against spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). In the middle of Ephesians is the promise that Jesus is "able to do far more than we could ever ask for or imagine. He does everything by his power that is working in us" (Ephesians 3:20, NIV). Ephesians speaks to us about the power of grace, prayer, and faith.

We must use that power of prayer, grace, and faith to study Ephesians. Ephesians is one of the great love letters of the Bible. The people who have worked on this Bible study guide hope that when you finish studying Ephesians, you will better understand what encouraged Ravi to reach out and help the visitor to his church. They also hope you will experience the power of the gospel that changes the lives and hearts of sinners.

John M. Fowler is the author of this quarter's Bible study guide. He is an associate director of the General Conference Education Department. Born in India, John spent many years in church service in Southern Asia before coming to the General Conference. At the General Conference, he worked with *Ministry* magazine before working for the Education Department. John is married and has two adult children.

²John Calvin—along with Martin Luther, John Calvin was a well-known leader of the Reformation Movement five hundred years ago in Europe. This reformation began when Bible students did not agree with the Roman Catholic Church's belief on how God saves us.

³doctrines—church beliefs.