

TEACHER'S GUIDE

In Christ

A verse-by-verse adult Bible study of Ephesians · eleven sessions

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SESSION 2	Every Spiritual Blessing	Ephesians 1:3-14
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By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · companion to *In Christ*, volume one of *The Pauline Captivity Letters*
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SESSION ONE

A Letter from Prison

Ephesians 1:1–2 · Introducing the Letter to the Ephesians

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session One of *In Christ*. You are beginning an eleven-session study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians — the first of four captivity letters this series will walk through, and in many ways the grandest of them. This guide exists to help you teach each session with confidence.

What you hold is a companion to the main Bible study book. The book itself is written for the student — a reader who will engage the chapter, look up the passages in his or her own Bible, and come to class prepared to discuss. This guide is written for you — the person responsible for shaping that hour of teaching and conversation.

Session One is especially important because it establishes the frame for the entire study. The student book deliberately begins not with the famous doxology of 1:3–14 but one verse earlier, at the address — Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, writing from Roman custody to a church he had served longer than any other. Your students may arrive expecting to dive straight into election and predestination. Resist the temptation to let them. The introductory work of this session — the man, the city, the situation, the themes — is what will make the doxology land next week with its full weight. If your students leave today understanding that this letter is pastoral correspondence from a prisoner, and that the little phrase *in Christ* is the key that will unlock all eleven sessions, they will be prepared for everything that follows.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Ephesians is a personal letter from an imprisoned apostle to a settled church in danger of drift, and its two-word theme — *in Christ* — names the location of every blessing, every identity, and every calling the letter will describe; establish that frame today, and the whole study stands on it.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session One of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians in one sitting. It takes about twenty minutes. The student book will spend eleven weeks in the parts; you should begin with a feel for the whole.
- ♦ Pay special attention to Ephesians 1:1–2 and to the hinge at 4:1 — *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*. The doctrine-then-life structure of the letter turns on that verse, and you will be referring to it all study long.
- ♦ Read Acts 19 and Acts 20:17–38 — Paul's three years in Ephesus and his tearful farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. This is the relational background of the whole letter, and the student book leans on it heavily.
- ♦ Review Luther's Small Catechism on Baptism, Part Four. The student book ties the *in Christ* language to baptismal union from the first session, and you will want that connection close at hand for the whole study.
- ♦ Pray. Eleven weeks is a long walk with a congregation through one letter. Commit the study to the Lord's keeping from the start.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, and ideally copies of the student book for any students who do not yet have one.
- ♦ A map showing Ephesus and the province of Asia. Any basic Bible atlas will have one. Students grasp the city's significance better when they can see it sitting on the Aegean coast at the junction of the great trade roads.
- ♦ A whiteboard or flip chart. Today you will write the phrase *in Christ* at the top and begin a running list beneath it — chosen in Christ, redeemed in Christ, sealed in Christ — that you can return to and extend every week of the study. This single visual, kept alive across eleven sessions, will do more to cement the letter's theme than any lecture.
- ♦ Name tags if you have new students.

Knowing Your Class

Different classes will bring different backgrounds to Ephesians. A few patterns to anticipate:

- ♦ **Lifelong Lutherans** may know Ephesians 2:8–9 by heart — many memorized it in confirmation — but may never have read the letter as one sustained pastoral document, from the prison cell to the armor of God. Framing the study as a single letter from a real prisoner gives them a fresh lens on familiar verses.
- ♦ **Students from evangelical backgrounds** may carry a decision-theology reading of 2:8–9, in which grace is what God offers and faith is the human contribution. Do not engage this today; the student book will address it directly in Session Four. Simply note privately which students may need care when that session arrives.
- ♦ **Students nervous about predestination** may tense up the moment Ephesians is announced, knowing chapter one is coming. You can defuse this gently today by noting that the letter speaks of election entirely as comfort — *He chose us in Him* — and that Session Two will take it up carefully. Do not let anxiety about next week derail this week.
- ♦ **Students in ordinary seasons of life** — no crisis, no drama, just the long middle of faith — will find the situation of the letter unexpectedly personal. Ephesians was written not for a church on fire but for a settled congregation in danger of drift. For many students, that is precisely their condition, and naming it can be quietly powerful.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and introduction to the series
0:05–0:13	The apostle Paul: from the Damascus road to Roman chains
0:13–0:21	Paul and Ephesus: three years and a tearful farewell
0:21–0:28	The city of Ephesus: Artemis, magic, and a mixed congregation
0:28–0:35	The situation and the setting: drift, not crisis
0:35–0:47	The themes: <i>in Christ</i> at the center (the heart of the session)
0:47–0:52	How we will read Ephesians: three commitments

0:52–0:58 Discussion (choose 1 question)

0:58–1:00 Closing prayer and Session 2 assignment

Where to Slow Down

The five themes — and *in Christ* above all — are the heart of the session. If time gets tight, cut minutes from the city of Ephesus or compress the date-and-setting material into two sentences. Never cut the themes. Everything in the next ten sessions stands on what you establish there.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Why Start Here?

Open by reading Ephesians 1:1–2 aloud — just the two verses. Then name the choice the student book has made: most studies of Ephesians begin with the doxology; this one begins at the address. Let your students feel that this is deliberate. The address names a writer, a recipient, and a relationship, and the whole letter is shaped by all three. Ephesians is not a doctrinal treatise dropped from the sky; it is pastoral correspondence — a particular apostle, a particular church, particular circumstances.

Some students will be eager to get to “the good stuff.” Assure them it is coming — and that this session is what will make the good stuff good. A doxology from nowhere is an abstraction. A doxology from a Roman prison cell is a testimony.

The Apostle Paul

The teaching move here is contrast. Most students carry a picture of Paul from Acts — the road-traveling missionary, shipwrecked and stoned and always moving. The Paul of this letter is a different figure: aged, chained, stationary, at the end of the long story. He has been in custody for years — first Caesarea, now Rome — a Roman citizen under guard awaiting his hearing before Caesar.

Do not rush past the chains. The student book will return to the prison setting throughout the study, and this whole series is built on the captivity letters as a group. A man in chains writing that Christ is *seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion* is making a claim that costs him something. Let your students sit with that tension for a moment; it is the emotional center of the session.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When the *in Christ* theme arrives later in the session, connect it to Baptism — and do it from the catechism your students already know. To be baptized is to be joined to Christ; everything Ephesians says the believer possesses *in Christ*, the Lutheran confesses was given *at the font*. You do not need to develop this today — the student book will build it across the study — but planting the connection in Session One means every subsequent occurrence of the phrase quietly reinforces baptismal identity. This is one of the great cumulative payoffs of the whole study.

Paul and Ephesus

Three years — by far the longest single ministry of Paul's career, daily teaching in the hall of Tyrannus, a riot of silversmiths, and afterward a farewell at Miletus so tender that the elders wept on his neck. Paul knew this church the way a pastor of a long tenure knows a congregation: by name, by family, by history.

If you read one passage aloud in this segment, make it Acts 20:36–38. Many students have never connected that scene to this letter, and once they do, the warmth of Ephesians stops being literary style and becomes personal affection.

After Paul came Timothy, and later the apostle John; the risen Christ Himself addresses this congregation in Revelation 2. You need not develop all of this — name it, and let the class feel that Ephesus sits at the center of the apostolic age.

A Note on Destination

The student book honestly notes that the words “in Ephesus” are missing from the earliest manuscripts, and that the letter may have circulated to several churches with Ephesus as its natural hub. Handle this in two minutes, not ten. The point to make is pastoral, not technical: nothing in the letter's teaching hangs on the question, and the Church has always received this letter as Scripture. A teacher who is unafraid of an honest manuscript note builds trust; a teacher who dwells on it loses the room. If a student wants more, take it offline after class.

The City of Ephesus

This is your map moment. Show the city — the harbor, the trade roads, the province of Asia spread behind it. Then populate it: the temple of Artemis, one of the wonders of the ancient world; the magicians and mystery religions; the philosophers; the trade guilds; the mixed population of Jews and Gentiles from across the empire.

The payoff to set up now: when Paul writes about *the rulers and authorities and cosmic powers of this present darkness* in chapter six, he is writing to people for whom the spiritual

atmosphere of their city was thick and unembarrassing. Plant that seed today; Session Eleven will harvest it.

The Situation: Drift, Not Crisis

This is the most pastorally resonant section of the session, and you should give it your full attention even though it is brief. Ephesians has no crisis behind it — no false teachers as in Galatians, no church fight as in Corinth, no personal dispute with Paul's authority. It is a letter for ordinary times: a settled congregation, a decade or more old, in danger not of collapse but of forgetting what it is.

Say plainly to your class: this makes Ephesians the most directly transferable of Paul's letters to a congregation like ours. Most of our churches are not in crisis. Most are in the long middle — and the long middle is where drift happens. Watch the room when you say this. For some students it will be the moment the study becomes personal.

The Date and Setting

Early 60s, Rome, the first imprisonment — guarded house arrest while Paul awaits Caesar. Tychicus carried the letter; Onesimus, the runaway slave of the letter to Philemon, traveled with him. Make the series connection explicit: Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon left Rome together, in the same hands, on the same roads. Students who stay for all four volumes of this series will watch that single journey from three vantage points. Two or three minutes is enough here; the dating matters less than the image of the chained man entrusting his letters to friends.

The Themes of Ephesians

The heart of the session. The student book names five themes; put all five on the whiteboard, but spend your weight on the first.

In Christ. Some form of the phrase — in Christ, in Him, in the Beloved — appears roughly thirty-five times in this short letter. Write the phrase at the top of the board and start the running list: chosen in Christ, redeemed in Christ, sealed in Christ, raised in Christ, seated with Him in the heavenly places. Tell the class this list will grow every week. There is no Christian life in Ephesians apart from incorporation into Christ — and for the Lutheran, that incorporation has an address: the font.

Election and grace. Chosen before the foundation of the world; saved by grace through faith, not by works. Name it as comfort, not controversy, and promise that Sessions Two and Four will give it full treatment.

One body. Jew and Gentile made one new man; the dividing wall broken down. The *una sancta* of the Creed finds its richest New Testament source here. Sessions Five and Seven will develop it.

Walk worthy. The hinge at 4:1. Three chapters of what God has done, then three chapters of what the Christian therefore does. Doctrine first, then life — the walking does not earn the calling; it answers it. This single sentence is worth having your students repeat.

The cosmic and the domestic. No other letter of Paul moves so freely between Christ enthroned above all powers and how a husband loves his wife. The vision is huge; the application is concrete. Refuse in advance the temptation to keep only the half we find comfortable.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Do not present the five themes as a list to be copied down. Present them as five threads of a single fabric, with *in Christ* as the loom. Election happens *in Christ*. The one body exists *in Christ*. The worthy walk is walked *in Christ*. The armor is put on *in Christ*. If your students leave able to say that one phrase organizes everything else, the session has succeeded — whatever else gets cut.

How We Will Read Ephesians

Close the teaching with the three interpretive commitments, briefly. First, we will read Ephesians as a pastoral letter, not systematic theology — asking what Paul's words meant to the believers at Ephesus before asking what they mean to us. Second, we will keep *in Christ* central — it is not a pious refrain but the load-bearing structure of the letter. Third, we will let the household instructions and the cosmic warfare have their proper weight — neither spiritualized away nor relativized as cultural artifact. Name all three; elaborate only if time allows. They will emerge naturally over the study.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one for this session. The introductory teaching content is substantial, and the frame needs to be established clearly; favor a single deep question over several shallow ones.

Question 1 — Your prior picture of Paul

A good low-stakes warm-up. Most students carry a Paul from Acts or from Romans; surfacing the difference between that figure and the imprisoned elder of this letter reinforces the session's opening contrast. Use it if your class is new or slow to talk.

Question 2 — Long pastorates and shared history

A warm question that lands especially well in congregations that have known the same pastor for many years. Be aware it can turn wistful in congregations that have had pastoral turnover or conflict; steer toward what long history makes possible, not toward grievances.

Question 3 — Drift versus crisis

The most searching question of the set. If your class can be honest, this conversation can be remarkable — most adults have watched a congregation drift and have never had language for it. Keep it general; do not let it become a referendum on your own congregation's leadership.

Question 4 — What *in Christ* means to you currently

The theological payoff question. *Vivid reality, pious abstraction, or something in between* gives students honest permission to admit the phrase has gone flat for them — which is precisely the condition the study aims to address. If students can name where they are starting, you will be able to mark how far they have come by Session Eleven.

Question 5 — Luther and Ephesians 2:8–9

Best for a class with confirmation memories of the verses. The sub-question — what in them have you sometimes resisted — is the live wire; the honest answer is usually the quiet suspicion that grace cannot really be free. Do not resolve that today. Session Four exists for it.

Question 6 — What are you hoping to receive

A good closing question. Record the answers — literally, write them down — and return to them in Session Eleven. Few things land at the end of a long study like a teacher reading back what students said they were seeking at the start.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session One, consider Question 4 — what *in Christ* means to you currently. It is the most directly on point with the session's frame, it requires no background knowledge, and it gives you a baseline reading of your class that every later session can build on. Question 6 is a strong alternative if you want to record expectations to revisit at the study's end.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ The *in Christ* theme and the whiteboard list. This is the session's reason for being. Never cut this.
- ♦ The contrast between the Paul of Acts and the chained Paul of this letter — enough to establish that a real prisoner wrote these words.
- ♦ The situation: drift, not crisis. Two minutes is enough, and it is the session's most personal moment.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 4.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 2 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The city of Ephesus. Name Artemis and the magicians in two sentences; the full picture can be rebuilt when chapter six approaches.
- ♦ The destination question. Skip it entirely unless a student raises it.
- ♦ The date-and-setting detail. "Rome, early 60s, first imprisonment" is enough; the Tychicus and Onesimus connection can wait for the Colossians and Philemon volumes.
- ♦ The three interpretive commitments. Name them in one sentence each; they will emerge naturally over the study.
- ♦ The fuller treatment of the four remaining themes. Name them on the board and move on; each has its own session coming.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the phrase *in Christ* written at the top of your whiteboard with the first entries of its running list beneath it. Everything else can be cut, compressed, or deferred. That phrase is the interpretive key for all eleven sessions. Get it established today, and the rest of the study will follow.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Acts 19.** Paul's three years in Ephesus — the hall of Tyrannus, the burning of the magic books, the riot of the silversmiths. The essential narrative background for the whole study.
- ♦ **Acts 20:17–38.** The farewell at Miletus. The single most important passage for feeling the relationship behind this letter.
- ♦ **Revelation 2:1–7.** The risen Christ's letter to the church at Ephesus, a generation later — including the warning about abandoning the first love. A sobering postscript to the drift theme.
- ♦ **Colossians 1–2.** Ephesians' sibling letter, carried on the same journey. Reading even its opening chapters now will prepare you for the family resemblance students will notice — and for this series' third volume.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Article IV, and Apology IV.** The confessional Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8–9 stands behind both, and grounding yourself here now will pay off richly in Session Four.
- ♦ **Small Catechism, Baptism, Parts One through Four.** The baptismal frame for the *in Christ* language that will run through every session.
- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Article XI.** On election. The definitive confessional treatment — election as comfort, grounded in Christ — and your preparation for Session Two.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** The most thorough confessional Lutheran treatment available, with particular strength on the letter's liturgical and baptismal character. If you buy one commentary for this study, buy this one.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (CPH).** The classic Missouri Synod treatment — older, but dogmatically rich and warmly pastoral.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Baker).** Exhaustive evangelical scholarship. Hoehner is not Lutheran, but his historical and grammatical work is consistently valuable for the teacher who wants to go deeper.

A Final Word

You are about to walk eleven weeks with a group of students through the grandest of Paul's prison letters. It is a letter the Lutheran tradition has loved from the beginning — Luther treasured it, the Confessions quote it, the hymnody sings it. It will form your students, and it will form you. Take the teaching seriously. Prepare each week. Pray for your class. Trust the Lord to do what only the Lord can do.

Session One is the foundation. If you establish the frame — a chained apostle, a settled church, and the little phrase that locates everything — the rest of the study has solid ground under it. Do not skimp on this session because it is “introductory.” It is not introductory in the sense of preliminary; it is foundational in the sense of load-bearing.

Next week, the doxology. Twelve verses, one Greek sentence, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places — chosen, predestined, redeemed, lavished, sealed. Your students will read Ephesians 1:3–14 before they arrive, and you will have the privilege of walking them through one of the most extraordinary passages in the New Testament. Prepare carefully.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the God who kept His apostle through chains and trial keep you and your students through all the weeks ahead.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWO

Every Spiritual Blessing

Ephesians 1:3–14

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Two. You move this week from introduction into the letter itself, and Paul has given you one of the most extraordinary passages in the New Testament for the transition. Verses 3 through 14 are, in the Greek, a single flowing sentence — twelve verses of accumulating glory, structured around a threefold refrain, in which Paul blesses God for every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places before he asks his readers for a single thing.

This is the pattern that will define the whole letter: indicative before imperative, gift before calling, what God has done before what we are called to do. The hinge at 4:1 — *walk worthy* — only makes sense because chapters one through three have first laid out the calling in all its richness. This week the riches begin, and they begin in a flood.

One pastoral caution as you prepare. This passage contains the word *predestined*, and some of your students will arrive braced for it. The student book handles election with great care — as comfort, not speculation, grounded entirely in Christ — and your task is to let that careful treatment set the tone before anyone's anxieties do. Do not apologize for the doctrine, and do not let the class relitigate Calvinism for forty minutes. Teach what Paul says, the way Paul says it: as a reason for praise.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Before Paul asks anything of his readers, he buries them under blessings — chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world, redeemed by the blood of the Son, sealed by the promised Holy Spirit — and this Trinitarian doxology, with election taught as comfort grounded in Christ, is the foundation on which the entire letter stands.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Two of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 1:3–14 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. In the Greek it is one sentence; in most English translations it is broken into several. Try to feel the cumulative weight of Paul piling one glory on another.
- ♦ Mark the three refrains: *to the praise of His glorious grace* (v. 6), *to the praise of His glory* (v. 12), *to the praise of His glory* (v. 14). They divide the passage into its Trinitarian movements — Father, Son, Spirit — and they will structure your teaching hour.
- ♦ Read Formula of Concord, Article XI, at least in the Epitome. The Lutheran doctrine of election — comfort, not speculation; grounded in Christ; received through the means of grace — is the backbone of this session, and you want it in your bones, not on a notecard.
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism's explanation of the Third Article: *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.* That confession is verses 13–14 in catechism form.
- ♦ Pray — specifically for any students you suspect carry old wounds about predestination. For some, this session can lift a weight they have carried for decades.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list begun last week. This passage will let you add to it generously — chosen in Him, redeemed in Him, sealed in Him — and the visible growth of the list is itself a teaching.
- ♦ Optional: something sealed — an envelope with a wax seal, a notarized document, even a package with a delivery label. The *sphragizō* image in verse 13 comes alive when students can see what a seal does: marks ownership, certifies authenticity, keeps secure until delivery.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Election as comfort, not speculation.** God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. The Lutheran tradition receives this as the deepest possible ground of assurance: your standing was settled before you were born, by God's mercy and not your resolve. What it refuses is speculation — peering into God's secret counsel to determine

who is elect. The believer looks to Christ, where election is revealed, and to the means of grace, where it is delivered.

- ♦ **Neither Calvin nor Arminius.** The Confessions reject double predestination (God choosing some for damnation) as speculation beyond what God has revealed, and they reject conditional election (God's choice grounded in foreseen faith) as making God's grace depend on something in us. The Lutheran reading simply says what Paul says: chosen in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him.
- ♦ **Adoption as the goal of the choosing.** We are predestined *for adoption* — *huiiothesia*. The believer is not merely a forgiven defendant but a son or daughter of the living God. The courtroom is real, but the choosing aims past it, at the family table.
- ♦ **The sealing of the Spirit and Baptism.** The order of verses 13–14 is the order of the Third Article: the Word comes first, faith follows, the Spirit seals. The Lutheran tradition reads this sealing in close relation to Baptism — the moment the Triune name is spoken over the believer and the mark of ownership is given — with the Spirit as *arrabōn*, the down payment guaranteeing the full inheritance.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session One
0:05–0:12	One long sentence: reading the doxology aloud
0:12–0:19	Blessed be the God and Father (v. 3)
0:19–0:32	Chosen before the foundation of the world (vv. 4–6) — the heart
0:32–0:40	In Him we have redemption; the mystery of His will (vv. 7–10)
0:40–0:47	An inheritance; sealed with the Spirit (vv. 11–14)
0:47–0:52	The Trinitarian shape and the three refrains
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 3 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, the election verses (vv. 4–6), because this is where the session's pastoral work is done and where students' lifelong anxieties either get healed or get reinforced. Second, the sealing of the Spirit (vv. 13–14), because this is where the passage lands in the students' own baptisms. The middle sections are rich, but if time runs short, these two are where your class most needs you.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

One Long Sentence

Open by reading the whole passage aloud — all twelve verses, without stopping. In English this takes about ninety seconds. Ask the class to listen for repeated phrases rather than trying to track the argument. The class should hear the sweep of it before you begin to unpack the parts; Paul did not write a list, and you should not teach one.

Then make the student book's pastoral observation: Paul writes this *before he asks his readers for anything*. A Christian who is about to be exhorted needs first to remember what he has received. When the ordinary drift of church life sets in — and drift, you established last week, is exactly the Ephesians' situation — the remedy begins not with a to-do list but with an inventory of what God has already done. That is why the letter opens here.

Blessed Be the God and Father

Note for your class that Paul opens with a Jewish liturgical formula — *blessed be God* — that any synagogue-formed reader would recognize. Paul is not improvising; he is taking a form deeply embedded in the worship of God's people and filling it with its Christian content. The God he blesses is not God in the abstract but *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. That specificity is already the whole Gospel in a phrase.

Two more observations worth a minute each. The blessings are *spiritual* — blessings of the Spirit, not vague inwardness — and they are located *in the heavenly places*, a phrase unique to Ephesians that will return at every major turn of the letter, climaxing in the warfare of chapter six. And they are given *in Christ*: the first entry of the day for your whiteboard list.

Chosen Before the Foundation of the World

The heart of the session. Take a breath, slow your pace, and teach verse four the way the student book does — as plainly as Paul writes it. The choosing is God's. It was made *in Him* — in Christ, the Beloved. It was made *before the foundation of the world* — before any human existed to be chosen. Its purpose is that we should be *holy and blameless before Him*.

Then do the pastoral work. Election, in the Lutheran reading, is primarily a doctrine of comfort. It answers the believer's deepest worry — *will my faith hold? will tomorrow's troubles sweep me away?* — by going behind it: you did not choose Him; He chose you, and what He settled in eternity He will not abandon in your present moment. Let that land before you fence anything.

Then fence carefully, because someone in the room needs the fences. The Formula of Concord devotes an entire article to this doctrine precisely to keep it from becoming a torment. Election is not a tool for speculation; Christians are not to peer into God's secret counsel to discover whether they or anyone else is elect. They are to look to Christ, where election is revealed. The Gospel is preached to all; Baptism is given; the Supper is set. The means of grace are how God's eternal choosing reaches a believer in time.

Finally, name the two ditches without driving into either. Not Calvinist double predestination — the Confessions reject the choosing of some for damnation as speculation beyond what God has revealed. Not Arminian conditional election — the Confessions reject grounding God's choice in foreseen faith, because it makes grace depend on something in us. The Lutheran reading is simply Paul's sentence, received whole.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student asks — and one will, this week or privately afterward — “*How do I know I'm one of the elect?*”, do not send them inward to examine the quality of their faith, and do not send them upward to guess at God's secret counsel. Send them to the font and the Word. *Were you baptized? Do you hear the Gospel? Then you have God's own testimony of His choosing, delivered to your address.* Election is not discovered by speculation; it is delivered by means. This single move, made calmly, has freed more anxious consciences than any argument about decrees ever has.

To the Praise of His Glorious Grace

Verse six gives the first refrain, and with it the passage's deepest logic: in the act of choosing and adopting, what becomes most visible about God is His *grace*. And we are blessed *in the Beloved* — the title rewards a pause. The Father's love for the Son and His love for those joined to the Son are not two loves. He loves Christ; He loves us in Christ; the same love. For students who suspect God merely tolerates them for Christ's sake, that sentence can be worth the whole evening.

In Him We Have Redemption

The second movement turns to the Son. Three things to draw out, briskly. First, redemption is *through His blood* — a purchase, at cost, and the cost is named. Second, grace is *lavished* — not measured out by our deserving but poured according to the riches of God's wealth. Third, the *mystery of His will*: God's plan, hidden in eternal counsel and now revealed, is to

unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. The student book calls this one of the most expansive statements in the New Testament, and it is. Your students' private salvation sits inside a plan the size of the cosmos. Some will find that enlarging; some will find it dizzying. Question 4 exists for them.

An Inheritance

Verses 11 and 12 introduce the inheritance language that verse 14 will complete. Keep this section brief in class — its full weight arrives with the sealing — but note the astonishing both-directions claim: we have obtained an inheritance, and (as the Greek can equally suggest) we have been made *His* inheritance. God's people are not only heirs; they are the treasure.

Sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise

The third movement, and your second place to slow down. Walk the order of verse 13 deliberately, because the order is the theology: they *heard* the word of truth; they *believed*; they were *sealed*. Word first, faith awakened by the Word, Spirit sealing the believer. This is the Small Catechism's Third Article in apostolic form — *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.*

Then teach the two Greek words, with your sealed object in hand if you brought one. *Sphragizō*: a seal marks ownership, certifies authenticity, keeps secure until delivery — and the Lutheran tradition has always read this sealing in close relation to Baptism, where the Triune name is spoken and the mark of ownership visibly given. *Arrabōn*: down payment, first installment, earnest money. The Spirit given now is God's pledge that the full inheritance is coming — heaven's guarantee, signed in the blood of Christ.

The Trinitarian Shape

Close the teaching by stepping back from the parts to the whole. The Father chose us — *to the praise of His glorious grace*. The Son redeemed us — *to the praise of His glory*. The Spirit sealed us — *to the praise of His glory*. One sentence, three movements, each Person at work, each work ending in praise. The doxology is a creed you can sing.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Do not teach this passage as seven doctrines to be checked off. Teach it as a single sweeping declaration of what the Christian possesses, and let the cumulative weight build — Paul is not informing his readers; he is burying them under blessings. Your students should leave feeling that same weight: that they possess more than they have ever adequately reckoned with, and that everything else in this letter rests on it.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. The teaching content this week is dense, and a single well-chosen question will serve the class better than three rushed ones.

Question 1 — Hearing the passage as one breath

A gentle opener that reinforces your opening move. If you read the passage aloud at the start, this question lets students name what they heard — the repetitions, the momentum, the feeling of accumulation. Good for classes that warm up slowly.

Question 2 — Election: comfort or anxiety

The session's center of gravity. Be prepared for real stories here — students raised under hard determinism, students told their doubts proved they were not elect, students who have avoided the doctrine entirely. Let the testimonies come, then gently anchor the class in the Lutheran reading: comfort, not speculation; grounded in Christ; delivered through Word and Sacrament. Do not let it become a debate about Calvinism in the abstract; keep it pastoral and personal.

Question 3 — Adoption: child of God, not merely forgiven sinner

A warm identity question that works in almost any class. The distinction is real and freeing: the courtroom verdict is true, but the choosing aims at the family table. Watch for students for whom “child of God” language has been cheapened by sentimentality; the eternal predestination behind it restores its weight.

Question 4 — The cosmic scope: enlarging or diminishing

The most reflective question of the set, best for classes that enjoy big-picture thinking. Both honest answers — *it enlarges my view* and *it makes me feel small* — are worth hearing, and the resolution is in the passage itself: the God whose plan spans heaven and earth chose *you*, by name, before the foundation of the world. Smallness and belovedness are not in tension.

Question 5 — Baptism as sealing

The strongest question for lifelong Lutherans, because it lets them re-read their own baptisms through verse 13. Be alert for students who worry that they felt nothing at their baptism or remember nothing of it; the seal's validity rests on the One who set it, not on the recipient's memory or sensation. That reassurance, spoken plainly, is one of the best gifts this session can give.

Question 6 — To the praise of His glory: humiliation or resting place

The most searching question, and the right closing note for a mature class. The honest tension — does living for God's glory diminish the human being? — deserves a real answer, and the passage gives one: the God who does all things for His glory has made *your adoption and inheritance* the content of that glory. His glory and your good are not competitors.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Two, consider Question 2 — election as comfort or anxiety. It addresses the passage's most pastorally loaded doctrine head-on, it lets you apply the Formula of Concord's wisdom where it actually touches lives, and for some students it will be the first time anyone has taught them that predestination is good news. Question 5 is the best alternative for a class of lifelong Lutherans who would profit most from the baptismal connection.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ Reading the whole passage aloud at the start. Ninety seconds that the rest of the session depends on. Never cut this.
- ♦ The election verses (vv. 4–6) with the full Lutheran treatment — comfort, the fences, look to Christ. This is the session's reason for being.
- ♦ The sealing of the Spirit (vv. 13–14) with the baptismal connection, even in compressed form.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 2.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 3 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Jewish liturgical background of *blessed be God*. Name it in one sentence.
- ♦ The inheritance section (vv. 11–12). Fold it into the sealing: the Spirit guarantees the inheritance.
- ♦ The mystery of His will (vv. 9–10). Compress to two sentences — the plan is cosmic, and your salvation sits inside it — and let Question 4 carry the rest if chosen.
- ♦ The extended *sphragizō* and *arrabōn* word studies. Keep the images (ownership mark, down payment); drop the vocabulary.

- ♦ The Trinitarian shape as a separate closing segment. Name the three refrains as you pass them instead.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be election taught as comfort — *you did not choose Him; He chose you, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, and He delivers that choosing to you in Word and Sacrament.* Everything else can be compressed or deferred. A student who hears that clearly has received what this session exists to give.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Romans 8:28–39.** Paul's other great treatment of predestination, ending in the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The two passages interpret each other: election always ends in assurance.
- ♦ **John 6:35–40.** The Father gives; the Son loses none of what is given. Jesus' own teaching of election as security, in His own voice.
- ♦ **Deuteronomy 7:6–8.** The Lord chose Israel not because of its size but because He loved it. The Old Testament grammar of election that Paul inherits: grounded in God's love, never in the chosen one's qualifications.
- ♦ **Galatians 4:4–7.** Adoption, the Spirit of the Son, and the cry of *Abba! Father!* The richest parallel to the *huiiothesia* of verse 5.
- ♦ **2 Corinthians 1:21–22.** The only other place Paul gathers anointing, sealing, and the Spirit as *arrabōn* in one breath. A compact cross-check for verses 13–14.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Article XI (Solid Declaration).** The definitive confessional treatment of election — its comfort, its Christ-centeredness, and its refusal of speculation. The single most important preparation document for this session.
- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Creed, Third Article.** *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe...* The catechetical form of verses 13–14, already in your students' memories.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, Baptism.** Luther on Baptism as God's work and pledge — the natural companion to the sealing language and a bridge to the baptismal thread of the whole study.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Especially strong on the liturgical character of the doxology and on the baptismal reading of the sealing. The pages on 1:3–14 are worth the volume's price for this session alone.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Stoeckhardt's treatment of election here is classic Missouri Synod doctrine at its warmest — written by a man who taught this passage to anxious consciences for decades.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Exhaustive on the grammar of the single Greek sentence and the structure of the refrains. Useful where precision matters.

A Final Word

You have an unusually rich passage to teach this week, and its riches can overwhelm a class if the teacher does not pace the delivery. Read it aloud at the start. Let the cumulative weight build. Resist the checklist. And keep the destination in view: a room full of people who walk out knowing they were chosen before the foundation of the world, redeemed at the cost of blood, and sealed as God's own possession.

Pay particular attention this week to any student who has been hurt by this doctrine — and they are more common than you may think. Hard teaching on predestination has driven tender consciences to despair for centuries; that is precisely why the Formula of Concord was written with such pastoral care. For such a student, this session can be the week the doctrine stops being a threat and becomes what Paul wrote it to be: a reason for praise. Be ready to follow up individually after class.

Next week, Paul stops blessing and starts praying. Having declared everything God has given, he asks God for the one thing the Ephesians still need — eyes to see it. The first great prayer of the letter, verses 15 through 23, climbs from the believer's heart to the resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Christ above every power. Read it carefully; it rewards the teacher who prepares well.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may the praise of His glorious grace be the song of your classroom.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION THREE

Paul's First Prayer

Ephesians 1:15–23

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Three. Last week Paul blessed God for every spiritual blessing; this week he stops blessing and starts asking. *For this reason* — because everything in the doxology is true of the Ephesians — Paul turns the same theological wealth into petition. And what he asks for is remarkable: not that God would give the Ephesians anything new, but that God would give them eyes to see what they have already been given.

Notice what this prayer is, for you specifically. It is your job description for the next nine weeks. Everything this study aims at — students grasping their election, their redemption, their sealing, their place in the body — is precisely what Paul prays the Ephesians would grasp. You cannot lecture this kind of seeing into existence; it is the Spirit's gift. Which means the most important preparation you do this week may not be your reading but your praying. Take Paul's prayer and pray it, by name, for the people on your class roster. Few disciplines will change your teaching more.

The passage also hands you one of the great confessional moments of the study. When Paul describes Christ *seated at God's right hand, far above all rule and authority*, he opens the door to the Lutheran teaching that Christ's session is not His absence but His all-powerful presence — a doctrine with direct consequences for the Lord's Supper. Handle it with care and without polemics; for many students it will reframe how they think about where Christ is right now.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Paul prays not that the Ephesians would receive new blessings but that the Spirit would enlighten the eyes of their hearts to see what they already possess — a hope, an inheritance, and a power measured by nothing less than the resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Christ, who fills His body, the Church.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Three of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 1:15–23 slowly, several times. Like the doxology, it is essentially one long sentence in the Greek — a prayer that climbs from the believer's heart to the throne of Christ. Try to feel the altitude gain.
- ♦ Read Psalm 110:1. *Sit at My right hand* is the Old Testament verse most quoted in the New, and it stands directly behind verses 20–22. You will want it on your lips in class.
- ♦ Read Colossians 1:9–14, the sibling prayer from the sibling letter, carried to Asia in the same satchel. The parallels will sharpen your sense of what is distinctive here.
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism on the Second Article — *He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God* — and, if you have time, skim Formula of Concord, Articles VII and VIII. The Lutheran teaching on Christ's session and presence is this session's confessional center.
- ♦ Pray — and specifically, pray this passage. Paul's petition for the Ephesians is the right petition for your class. Pray it for them by name this week, and consider telling them at the start of class that you did.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list. Today's additions come from the high places: raised with Him in view, seated far above every power — and the Church as His body, His fullness.
- ♦ A whiteboard area for the prayer's three petitions — *hope, inheritance, power* — which you will want visible during both the teaching and the discussion.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The prayer is for sight, not acquisition.** Paul does not ask God to do new things for the Ephesians; he asks God to help them grasp the things already done. So much of the Christian's struggle is not lack of blessing but forgetfulness of blessing. The Spirit's work of illumination — *the eyes of your hearts enlightened* — is the remedy, and it comes through the Word.

- ♦ **The Spirit and the Word belong together.** To be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation is to be given the gift of grasping what God has spoken. Luther insisted that no one understands Scripture rightly except by the gift of the Holy Spirit: the same Spirit who inspired the writing illumines the reading. Christianity is not speculation climbing up to God; it is revelation handed down, and received by Spirit-given sight.
- ♦ **Christ's session is presence, not absence.** The Reformed tradition came to argue that Christ's body is confined to heaven at God's right hand and therefore cannot be present in the Supper. The Lutheran Confessions answer that the right hand of God is not a location but the seat of almighty authority — and from it, by the union of His two natures, Christ is present with His Church wherever He pleases, supremely at the altar, where He gives His body and blood under bread and wine. The session is a doctrine of His all-powerful nearness.
- ♦ **The Church is His body and His fullness.** The exalted Christ who fills all in all has a body on earth, and it meets on Sunday mornings. The Church is where the universal reign of Christ becomes concrete — audible in the Word, touchable in the Sacraments, visible in the saints. Membership in a congregation is participation in the fullness of the One enthroned above every name.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Two
0:05–0:12	<i>For this reason:</i> from doxology to prayer
0:12–0:18	Faith and love; thanksgiving without ceasing (vv. 15–16)
0:18–0:27	The Spirit of wisdom; the eyes of the heart (vv. 17–18a)
0:27–0:38	Three things to know: hope, inheritance, power (vv. 18b–19)
0:38–0:48	Raised, seated, far above all (vv. 20–21) — the heart
0:48–0:52	All things under His feet; the Church as His body (vv. 22–23)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)

0:58–1:00

Closing prayer and Session 4 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, the nature of the petition itself (vv. 17–18a) — sight, not acquisition — because it reframes how your students pray and names what this whole study is for. Second, the session at the right hand (vv. 20–21), because the Lutheran reading of Christ's enthronement as presence rather than absence is the passage's confessional jewel, and most students have never heard it taught.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

From Doxology to Prayer

Open by reading the whole passage aloud, then point to its first words: *for this reason*. Paul has spent twelve verses piling up what God has done; now he turns the pile into a prayer. There is a kind of teaching that stays in the third person — it explains the doctrine and asks nothing for you personally. Paul is not content with that, and the shift models something for every teacher and every parent in your room: doctrine taught is meant to become doctrine prayed.

If you prayed this prayer for your students during the week, this is the moment to say so. It costs you one sentence and it teaches more about the passage than ten minutes of explanation.

Faith and Love, Without Ceasing

Verses 15 and 16 are easy to rush; don't entirely. Paul gives thanks for two things he has *heard* about the Ephesians: their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints. Faith and love — the vertical and the horizontal, the root and the fruit — the pair the Lutheran tradition never separates and never confuses. Faith receives everything from God; love hands it on to the neighbor.

And Paul does this *without ceasing*. Behind every letter of Paul stands a man on his knees, in chains, naming congregations before God. Invite your students to consider who is praying for them that way — and for whom they are that person.

The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation

Now the heart of the petition. Paul asks *the Father of glory* — a phrase holding together God's unapproachable majesty and His fatherly nearness — to give the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. Make the student book's point as sharply as it makes it:

this is not a prayer for new blessings. It is a prayer for sight. Not *give them more; help them see what You have given*.

Then make the Lutheran move on Scripture. The knowledge of God is not climbed up to; it is handed down. The Spirit who inspired the Word illumines the reading of it — Luther said no one understands Scripture rightly except by the Spirit's gift. We do not approach the Bible as a puzzle for our cleverness; we approach it as God's Word and ask God to open it. Without the Spirit it remains closed to the cleverest reader; with the Spirit it opens to the simplest believer who comes in faith. This is why your class opens with prayer — and it is worth telling them so.

The Eyes of the Heart

The image deserves a moment of its own. There is a seeing that is not intellectual assent — when something a student has known for forty years suddenly becomes something they can *see*. Every veteran teacher has watched it happen across a table; it cannot be scheduled or manufactured, and it is exactly what Paul is asking God to do. Name the image, let it breathe, and move on. Question 3 will let students testify to it.

What They Are to Know: Hope, Inheritance, Power

The petition is precise — three definite things, which belong on your whiteboard.

The hope to which He has called you. Not vague optimism but concrete expectation: the resurrection of the body, the new creation, unbroken communion with the triune God. So much of the believer's weariness is forgetfulness of where the story is going; to remember the hope is to be steadied in the present.

The riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints. The Greek genuinely permits two readings — the inheritance we receive from God, or God's own inheritance *in us* — and the student book lets both stand. Do the same, because the second reading is worth its shock value: the God of glory counts redeemed sinners His treasure. The riches run both directions.

The immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe. Not power in the abstract — power *toward us*. The Christian is not running on personal resources; the same power that opened Christ's tomb sustains the believer's faith, carries him through suffering, and will raise him at the last day. This third petition is the bridge into the passage's summit, so take it directly into the next section.

The Working of His Great Might

How great is the power toward us? Paul answers with a résumé: God *raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named*.

Anchor the resurrection first. The hope is not philosophical and the power is not metaphorical; both are tied to a tomb outside Jerusalem that was found empty on the third

day. If Christ has not been raised, faith is vain and we are still in our sins — but Christ has been raised, and that fact organizes everything else.

Then teach the session — the enthronement — and give it the Lutheran care it deserves. To sit at God's right hand is not retirement; it is reign. And here, gently, draw the confessional line the student book draws. The Reformed tradition, following Calvin and Zwingli, reasoned that Christ's body is located in heaven and therefore cannot be on the altar. The Lutheran Confessions answer: the right hand of God is not a place where Christ is kept; it is the authority by which He is present wherever He wills — including in the Supper, where He gives His true body and blood under bread and wine. The session is not a doctrine of Christ's absence. It is the doctrine of His all-powerful presence.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student asks where Christ is right now, resist the spatial answer — “up in heaven” — that quietly removes Him from the room. The confessional answer is better: He is at the right hand of God, and the right hand of God is everywhere His authority reaches. He is therefore here — ruling, present, accessible by faith, and supremely accessible at the altar, where He has attached His presence to bread and wine by His own promise. Students who learn this stop thinking of the Supper as a memorial of an absent Lord and start receiving it as the gift of a present one. Sunday changes after this session, if you teach it well.

All Things Under His Feet — for the Church

Do not let the class miss the last clause, because it is the most surprising. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave Him *as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*. The enthronement is *for* the Church. The cosmic Lord has a body on earth, and it meets on Sunday morning with bad coffee and a slightly flat opening hymn.

For the Ephesians, surrounded by the temple of Artemis and a city thick with powers, this was the astonishing claim: their modest assembly was the body of the One enthroned above it all. Say the modern equivalent plainly — your congregation, whatever its size, is where the universal reign of Christ becomes concrete. Question 6 will let the class take this personally.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Teach this prayer as an ascent, because that is how Paul built it — it begins in the believer's heart and climbs, petition by petition, to the throne of Christ above every power, then descends in the final verse to land on the Church. Do not flatten it into three points and a doctrine. Let the class feel the altitude gain, and let them feel the landing: all of that height, *given to the Church*. If your students leave having seen the climb and the landing, the session has done its work.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. This session's teaching has a long ascent to make, and the discussion should consolidate the view from the top rather than open new terrain.

Question 1 — Thanking God for others' faith and love

A gentle opener with a real edge: thanking God *for* people is different from thanking people. It quietly confesses that their faith and love are God's work. Good for warming up a class, and it can change how members speak about one another.

Question 2 — Praying for sight versus praying for new things

The question that most directly engages the session's frame. Most students will admit their prayer lists are acquisition lists; this question opens the alternative without scolding. Expect some honest self-recognition, and close by pointing out that Paul's kind of prayer is available to them this very week.

Question 3 — When knowing became seeing

A testimony question, and often the richest conversation of the night in a trusting class. Students will tell of funerals, communions, hymn verses, and ordinary Tuesdays when something long known suddenly became sight. Let the stories run; they are the eyes-of-the-heart doctrine teaching itself.

Question 4 — Hope, inheritance, or power: which do you sense, which is hardest

The most broadly usable question — personal, concrete, requiring no background. The variety of answers is the payoff: students discover that what is vivid to one is opaque to another, which is itself a small lesson in why the body needs all its members.

Question 5 — The session at the right hand and the Supper

The confessional question, best for a doctrinally hungry class. Students from Reformed or evangelical backgrounds may be hearing the Lutheran reading for the first time; keep the tone warm and unpolemical — the point is not to defeat Geneva but to receive the comfort of a present Christ. If communion practice questions arise, take them after class.

Question 6 — The Church as Christ's body and fullness

The application question, and a quietly searching one. Most members think of church membership administratively; verse 23 makes it ontological. Watch for the student who has been treating church as optional — this question, gently handled, does its own work.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Three, consider Question 4 — hope, inheritance, or power. It sends every student back into the text, it personalizes the prayer's exact petitions, and the spread of answers will show your class why Paul prayed all three. Question 5 is the strong alternative for a class ready to receive the confessional teaching on Christ's presence — and if your class communes together regularly, it may be the more valuable conversation.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ The shift from doxology to prayer, and the petition's nature: sight, not acquisition. This is the session's frame. Never cut this.
- ♦ The three things to know — hope, inheritance, power — even in compressed form. They are the prayer's content.
- ♦ The session at the right hand with the Lutheran reading: presence, not absence. The confessional heart of the passage.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 4.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 4 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The faith-and-love thanksgiving (vv. 15-16). One sentence: Paul gives thanks before he asks.
- ♦ *The Father of glory*. Name the phrase; skip the development.

- ♦ The both-ways ambiguity of the inheritance. Pick the reading you find most pastorally useful and footnote the other.
- ♦ The full list of authority terms in verse 21. “Far above every power and every name” carries the point.
- ♦ The fullness language of verse 23. Land on “His body” and let Question 6 carry the rest if chosen.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the nature of the petition: God has already given everything in Christ, and Paul prays for eyes to see it. That single insight reorders a student's prayer life, names the purpose of this entire study, and carries the doxology of last week into the life of this one. Everything else can wait; this cannot.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Psalm 110.** *Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.* The most-quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament, and the scriptural bedrock under verses 20–22.
- ♦ **Acts 2:32–36.** Peter's Pentecost sermon, preaching the resurrection and session from Psalm 110. The apostolic church proclaimed Christ's enthronement from its first public breath.
- ♦ **Colossians 1:9–14.** The sibling prayer in the sibling letter. Comparing the two petitions shows what each letter most wants its readers to see.
- ♦ **John 14:15–27.** Jesus' promise of the Spirit who teaches and brings to remembrance. The Gospel foundation for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.
- ♦ **1 Corinthians 15:20–28.** All things under His feet, until the last enemy is destroyed. Paul's fullest treatment of where the session is headed.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Creed, Second Article.** *He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty* — with Luther's explanation that the risen Lord lives and reigns. The catechetical form of verses 20–21.

- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Articles VII and VIII.** The Lord's Supper and the Person of Christ. The full confessional argument that Christ's session at the right hand grounds His presence in the Sacrament rather than excluding it. The essential preparation for this session's confessional center.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Creed.** Luther on the Second and Third Articles together — the reigning Christ and the illuminating Spirit, the two great actors of this passage.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Particularly valuable on the prayer's liturgical shape and on the session-and-presence doctrine; Winger's excursus material here will arm you for Question 5.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Warm and precise on the three petitions, with the old Missouri instinct for turning exegesis into consolation.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Thorough on the grammar of the long sentence and the inheritance ambiguity in verse 18. Useful where precision matters.

A Final Word

You are teaching a prayer this week, and that should shape how you teach. The passage does not merely inform; it intercedes. Somewhere in your class is a student who has known the doctrines for decades and never once seen them — and this passage was written, and is now being taught, precisely for that student. Pray for the eyes of their heart, and then teach the passage and trust the Spirit to do what only the Spirit can do.

Do not shortchange the confessional teaching on Christ's session out of fear of controversy. Taught warmly, it is not controversy; it is comfort — the difference between a Lord remembered and a Lord present. Your students live their whole week under powers that look untouchable. They need to know who is seated above every one of them, and where He has promised to meet them.

Next week, the most famous paragraph in the letter. Paul descends from the heights of chapter one to the depths of what we were — dead in trespasses and sins — and then lifts the whole passage on two words: *but God*. Ephesians 2:1–10 is the Lutheran crux of the study, the by-grace-through-faith passage your students have waited for. Read it carefully, and rest well before you teach it; it deserves you at your best.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may the eyes of your own heart be enlightened as you prepare.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FOUR

By Grace Through Faith

Ephesians 2:1–10

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Four. This is the session your students have been waiting for, whether they know it or not. If Ephesians 1:3–14 is the New Testament's great doxology, Ephesians 2:1–10 is its great soteriological summary — and verses 8 and 9 are the whole Reformation in some forty words. Many in your class memorized them at confirmation. Your task this week is to give them back those verses with their full weight restored.

That weight depends on the darkness that comes first, and here is the week's chief temptation: rushing verses 1 through 3 to get to the good news. Resist it. Paul opens with one of the bleakest descriptions of the human condition in all of Scripture — *dead in trespasses and sins*, walking under the world, the devil, and the flesh, *by nature children of wrath* — and he does not soften it, because the Gospel cannot be heard rightly until the diagnosis has been received. If we are merely sick, we need advice. If we are dead, we can only be raised. The brightness of *but God* in verse 4 is exactly proportional to how dark you let verses 1 through 3 be.

Be aware, too, that this session carries unusual pastoral freight. Somewhere in your room is a student who has spent a lifetime quietly propping up their salvation with their performance — and somewhere else, a student who suspects they are too far gone for God to want. This passage was written for both of them. Teach it as the rescue it describes.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The natural human being is not weakened but dead — dead in trespasses, bound to the world, the devil, and the flesh, by nature under wrath — and salvation is therefore God's act from beginning to end: *but God*, rich in mercy, made the dead alive with Christ, by grace alone, through faith alone, as pure gift, creating a new people for the good works He prepared in advance.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Four of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 2:1–10 slowly, several times — and practice reading verses 1 through 4 aloud. The pivot at *but God* should be audible in your voice before it is visible on the page.
- ♦ Read Ezekiel 37:1–14, the valley of dry bones. *Can these bones live?* is the question under this whole passage, and the prophet's answer is Paul's answer: only by the Word and the Spirit of God.
- ♦ Review Augsburg Confession, Articles II and IV — original sin and justification. This session is where both articles live, and you want their language fresh: *by nature unable to fear, love, or trust God; justified freely for Christ's sake through faith*.
- ♦ If you have time, read even a few pages of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*. The corpse does not cooperate with the surgeon; Luther's whole argument against Erasmus is the doctrine of verse 1 taken seriously.
- ♦ Pray — for the performer and the despairer in your class by name, if you know who they are. This is their week.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list. Today's additions are the heart of it: made alive together with Christ, raised up with Him, seated with Him in the heavenly places — the believer's biography written in Christ's verbs.
- ♦ A clean section of whiteboard for the passage's structure in three lines: *DEAD* (vv. 1–3) — *BUT GOD* (vv. 4–9) — *FOR GOOD WORKS* (v. 10). The shape of the passage is the shape of the Gospel, and students should see it.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Dead, not sick.** *Nekros* — the word behind our “necrosis” — does not mean wounded, weakened, or struggling. Paul describes the natural man in the language of the morgue. This is the proof-text, with Romans 3, for the bondage of the will: a corpse does not cooperate with the surgeon; it is operated on. Any flicker of faith, any movement toward Christ, is the Spirit’s work, not the corpse’s contribution.
- ♦ **Wrath rightly understood.** *Children of wrath by nature* does not describe a capricious or wounded divine ego. God’s wrath in Scripture is His settled, righteous opposition to sin — His holy resolve that what contradicts His character cannot stand forever in His universe. And it falls on us *by nature*: this is original sin as Augsburg Confession II confesses it — not merely the acts we commit but the corrupt nature from which the acts flow.
- ♦ **Sola gratia, sola fide — with assurance built in.** *By grace you have been saved* stands in the Greek perfect tense: a completed act whose effects continue. The Christian does not wonder whether he is saved; he *has been* saved and stands in it. Faith is not the human contribution that completes grace; it is the beggar’s empty hand receiving the bread — and even the hand is given, awakened by the Spirit through the Word. No works, no merit, no boast.
- ♦ **Saved for works, never by them.** Verse 10 does not take back verses 8 and 9; it completes them. The believer is God’s *poiēma* — His workmanship, His poem — created in Christ Jesus *for* good works God prepared beforehand. Works flow out of salvation, not into it, the way fruit flows from a living tree. And the prepared works have addresses: marriage, children, workbench, neighborhood. This verse is the foundation of the Lutheran doctrine of vocation.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Three
0:05–0:14	Dead in trespasses and sins (v. 1) — the diagnosis
0:14–0:21	The world, the devil, the flesh (vv. 2–3a)

0:21–0:27	Children of wrath by nature (v. 3b)
0:27–0:35	<i>But God</i> (vv. 4–5) — the hinge
0:35–0:41	Made alive, raised up, seated with Christ (vv. 5–7)
0:41–0:50	By grace, through faith, not of works (vv. 8–9) — the heart
0:50–0:54	Created for good works: vocation (v. 10)
0:54–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 5 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, the hinge at verses 4 and 5 — *but God, being rich in mercy* — because this is where the passage's pastoral power lives, and it deserves silence around it. Second, verses 8 and 9, taught phrase by phrase with their full confessional weight. The diagnosis sections matter enormously, but they exist to make these two places land.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Dead in Trespasses and Sins

Open by reading the whole passage aloud, then return to the first verse and sit in it. *And you were dead*. Press the word the way the student book presses it: not sick, not wounded, not weakened — dead. Whatever vitality the natural man seems to have, whatever moral effort or religious instinct, at the level Paul is describing he is a corpse. Paul writes in the language of the morgue.

Then give the class the Lutheran inheritance of this verse. It is the proof-text for the bondage of the will, the doctrine Luther defended against Erasmus in his most famous polemical work. Erasmus argued the natural will retained some capacity to cooperate with grace. Luther's answer came straight from verses like this one: a corpse does not cooperate with the surgeon. A corpse is operated on. The natural man does not contribute to his salvation; it is given to him from outside, by the God who raises the dead.

Expect resistance — this cuts against everything our therapeutic culture teaches about innate human goodness. Do not apologize and do not gloat. The diagnosis is severe because

the disease is severe, and the students who receive it are the ones who will hear verse 4 as the thunderclap it is.

The World, the Devil, the Flesh

Verses 2 and 3 name the powers the dead man walked under, and your class should notice they are the classical triad of the catechism and the baptismal rite: the course of *this world*, the *prince of the power of the air*, and the *passions of our flesh*. Dead does not mean inert; the corpse was walking — but walking on paths laid by three masters it could not see.

Keep this section brisk but make one observation: the triad explains why self-reform fails. A man may resist one enemy and be carried by the other two. Only a rescue that deals with all three — and with the death beneath them — is good news. Question 2 will let students locate the pressure of each in their own lives.

Children of Wrath by Nature

The most uncomfortable phrase in the passage, and it needs your most careful handling. Two clarifications, in order. First, what wrath is not: petty, capricious, the irrational anger of an offended ego. The wrath of God is His settled, righteous opposition to sin — His holy refusal to let what contradicts His character stand forever. A God without that resolve would not be holy, and His love would be sentimentality.

Second, *by nature*. Not by misfortune, not by isolated misstep — by the nature we were born with, inherited in the line of fallen Adam. This is original sin as the Augsburg Confession states it without flinching: conceived and born in sin, by nature without true fear of God, true faith in God. Paul says *like the rest of mankind* and includes himself. No exemptions, no exceptions — which means, when grace comes, no qualifications either.

But God

And then verse 4. Two words in Greek, and the student book is right to call them the most important *but* in all of Paul. Slow down. Lower your voice. Read it: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*

Walk the phrases. *But God* — not “but humanity figured something out,” not “but the situation proved less serious,” not “but we rallied.” The action that breaks death is God’s action. *Rich in mercy* — not a measured ration but a treasury; there is more mercy in God than there is sin in the sinner. *The great love with which He loved us* — and note when: *even when we were dead*. The love did not wait for us to become lovable. It predates any change in us, because it is the love that causes the change.

Tell your class plainly: every Christian who has ever come to the end of his own resources is met in this verse. The God of the Bible does not wait to be impressed. He reaches into the morgue, because that is what He is like.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Let the darkness be dark before you let the light in. The session's entire power depends on not rushing verses 1 through 3 — dead, enslaved, under wrath — so that *but God* arrives as the interruption Paul wrote it to be. If you soften the diagnosis to spare the room, you will also mute the rescue, and verses 8 and 9 will land as familiar wallpaper instead of breaking news. Trust the structure: the passage itself is a death and a resurrection, and it should feel like one.

Made Alive, Raised Up, Seated With

Verses 5 through 7 give the rescue in three verbs, and each is a *with-Christ* verb: made alive *together with* Christ, raised up *with* Him, seated *with* Him in the heavenly places. Send your students back to last week: everything God did to Christ in 1:20 — raised, seated — He has now done to them. The believer's biography is written in Christ's verbs. And the seating is present tense: not “will be seated someday” but seated now, while the laundry still needs doing. Question 5 lives here.

Verse 7 gives the purpose: that in the coming ages God might display *the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us*. The Church is God's eternal exhibit of grace. Touch it and move on; the summary is coming.

By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith

Now the famous verses, and the right way to honor them is phrase by phrase, slowly, as if the class had never heard them.

By grace — *chariti*, unmerited favor as the operative cause. Salvation originates in God's free favor and nowhere else. *Sola gratia*, and this is one of its great proof-texts.

You have been saved — Greek perfect tense: completed action, continuing effect. Salvation is not an ongoing project that may or may not pan out. It is finished, secured by Christ's cross, applied by the Spirit — and the believer stands in it. Say it pastorally: the Christian does not need to wonder whether he is saved. He has been.

Through faith — and define faith the Lutheran way before anyone smuggles in the wrong definition. Faith is not the meritorious work that earns salvation; it is the beggar's empty hand receiving the bread. The hand earns nothing. The hand only receives.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — the grammar debate (does “this” refer to faith or to the whole salvation?) matters less than the substance, which is settled by verse 1: the dead man of this passage cannot generate faith any more than he can generate any other living act. Faith itself is gift, awakened by the Spirit through the Word.

Not a result of works, so that no one may boast — dead works cannot resurrect a dead man; they are symptoms of the disease, not its cure. The Reformation's quarrel with the medieval

system was exactly here: not that Rome denied grace, but that it built human contribution alongside grace. Any system that adds our work to God's grace as a basis for salvation has not yet understood the Gospel. The saved man has nothing to boast of — and everything to give thanks for.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student asks — and one will — “*But isn’t faith our part? Don’t we at least have to believe?*”, do not concede the framework. Answer with the beggar’s hand: faith receives, and receiving is not contributing. Then go one step further, back to verse 1: the man in this passage is dead, and the dead do not even extend a hand — God opens the hand He fills. Even our believing is His gift, worked by the Spirit through the Word. Said warmly, this does not diminish the student; it relieves them. The last sliver of salvation they thought they had to supply was never theirs to carry.

Created for Good Works

Verse 10 looks, at first glance, like it takes back everything — good works, immediately after the great exclusion of works. Teach the Lutheran resolution cleanly: works are not the cause of salvation but its result. Not saved *by* works; saved *for* them. First grace creates the new man; then the new man, alive by the Spirit, bears works the way a living tree bears fruit. The tree does not earn its life by fruiting. It fruits because it is alive.

Give them the word: *poiēma* — workmanship, the word behind our “poem.” The Christian is God’s composition. And then the most overlooked phrase in the verse: works *which God prepared beforehand*. The election of chapter one and the good works of chapter two are one fabric — the God who chose you before the foundation of the world also laid the particular path of works you would walk. This is the foundation of the Lutheran doctrine of vocation: when a husband loves his wife, a mother tends her children, a craftsman works with skill, a neighbor shows up with a casserole — that is the prepared path. Sanctification mostly looks ordinary, because God prepared ordinary works and filled them with His purpose. Question 6 makes this personal.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. This week more than most, the discussion should serve the Gospel the class has just heard rather than open new fronts.

Question 1 — Dead, not sick: too severe or honest?

A strong opener for a class willing to argue in good faith. Expect some pushback from students invested in human goodness; let the objections surface fully before responding,

and respond from the text, not from the culture war. The students who concede the diagnosis are the ones positioned to hear the cure.

Question 2 — World, devil, flesh: where do you feel each?

The most concrete diagnostic question. The sub-question — which is most subtle in our culture — usually produces the best conversation; many classes land on the world, precisely because its pressure feels like normalcy. Keep it personal rather than political.

Question 3 — Original sin: condition versus acts

The doctrinal question, good for a class that likes precision. Many students have thought of sin only as a list of deeds; AC II's deeper diagnosis reframes their whole self-understanding — and explains why the remedy had to be death and resurrection rather than improvement.

Question 4 — Your own *but God* moment

The testimony question, and in a trusting class the most powerful hour this study will produce. Open it gently, allow silence, and do not press anyone to share. One honest account of grace interrupting despair will preach this passage better than your notes. Be prepared to follow up privately with anyone visibly moved.

Question 5 — Seated with Christ, now

The identity question. Most Christians instinctively defer their standing to the future tense; this question confronts the present tense of verse 6. Ask the practical follow-up: what would Monday look like if you believed you were already seated there?

Question 6 — Vocation: the works prepared for you

The application question, and the one that sends the session home. Have students actually name their callings out loud — spouse, parent, employee, neighbor, member — and locate the prepared works inside them. Guard against the inevitable drift toward “church work” as the only real good work; the doctrine of vocation exists to bless the laundry and the ledger.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Four, consider Question 4 — the *but God* testimony — if your class has the trust to carry it; nothing cements this passage like hearing it confirmed from a chair in the room. If your class is newer or more reserved, choose Question 6 instead: vocation turns the session's doctrine into Monday morning, and no one has to bare their soul to answer it.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ The diagnosis of verse 1, even compressed: dead, not sick — and the corpse-and-surgeon image. The Gospel's weight depends on it. Never cut this.
- ♦ The hinge at verses 4 and 5, read slowly, with the phrases walked: *but God, rich in mercy, loved us while dead*.
- ♦ Verses 8 and 9 taught phrase by phrase — grace, the perfect tense, the beggar's hand, the gift, no boasting.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 6 under time pressure.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 5 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The world-devil-flesh triad. Name the three masters in one sentence; the catechism will keep teaching it after class ends.
- ♦ The wrath clarifications. Keep “settled righteous opposition, not capricious anger” and move on.
- ♦ The coming-ages display of verse 7. One sentence: the Church is God's eternal exhibit of grace.
- ♦ The “and this” grammar question. Skip straight to the substance: the dead cannot generate faith; faith is gift.
- ♦ The *poiēma* word study. Keep vocation in two sentences: saved for prepared works, and the works have your family's names on them.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be verses 8 and 9 taught with their full Lutheran weight: saved by grace alone, through faith alone, as God's gift alone — with even faith itself given, so that no one may boast. A student who hears that clearly, against the black backdrop of verse 1, has received the heart of this letter, this study, and the Reformation itself.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Ezekiel 37:1–14.** The valley of dry bones. *Can these bones live?* The Old Testament's own picture of resurrection by the Word and the Spirit — and the best sermon illustration this passage will ever have.
- ♦ **John 11:38–44.** Lazarus. The dead man does not assist his own raising; he is called out by a word. The narrative form of Ephesians 2:1–5.
- ♦ **Romans 3:9–26.** Paul's fullest diagnosis and his fullest statement of justification — the parallel track to this passage, with the courtroom where Ephesians has the morgue.
- ♦ **Romans 6:1–14.** Buried and raised with Christ through Baptism. The sacramental ground under the *with-Christ* verbs of verses 5 and 6.
- ♦ **Titus 3:3–8.** *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness* — with the washing of regeneration named outright. The tightest parallel to verses 8 through 10 in all of Paul.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Articles II and IV, with Apology IV.** Original sin and justification — the two confessional articles this passage underwrites. Apology IV is the Lutheran Church's most extended meditation on grace and faith ever written, and it breathes Ephesians 2 throughout.
- ♦ **Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*.** The classic defense of the doctrine of verse 1 against Erasmus. Even a sampling will steel you for Question 1's pushback.
- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Article II.** Free will — the mature confessional settlement of what the natural man can and cannot do, stated with the corpse-raising clarity this passage demands.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Superb on the baptismal undertow of the *with-Christ* verbs and on keeping verses 8–10 together as one movement.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** His pages on 2:8–9 are old Missouri gold — doctrine preached to the conscience, never past it.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** The standard detailed discussion of the “and this” grammar in verse 8, for the teacher who wants the technical case laid out.

A Final Word

You are teaching the Reformation in miniature this week — death, *but God*, grace, faith, gift, and then a life of prepared works. Teach it in that order, at that pace, and trust the order to do its work. The structure of the passage is the structure of every conversion and every absolution your students will ever receive.

And keep watch for the two students this session was written for. The performer needs to hear the perfect tense — *you have been saved* — until the scaffolding of self-justification can come down. The despairer needs to hear *even when we were dead* — that the love arrived before any improvement and does not depend on any. Both may want a word with you after class. Leave room for it.

Next week, Paul widens the lens. The same *but God* mercy that raised the individual sinner has reconciled Jew and Gentile into one new man — the dividing wall broken, the far brought near, a holy temple rising on the cornerstone. Ephesians 2:11–22 is one of the great unity passages of the New Testament, and after this week's depths it reads like a homecoming. Read it twice before Session Five, and notice the once-and-now contrasts.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may the riches of His mercy be the air your classroom breathes.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FIVE

One New Man

Ephesians 2:11–22

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Five. Last week Paul described the salvation of the individual sinner — dead, then made alive by grace through faith. This week he widens the lens to the salvation of a people. The same *but God* mercy that raised the dead man has reconciled the two great divided halves of humanity, Jew and Gentile, into *one new man*. The passage runs on the same engine as 2:1–10 — a bleak *once*, a glorious *now*, and the blood of Christ between them — but the canvas is now corporate, and the result is one of the great unity passages of the New Testament.

The teaching key this week is concreteness. Modern readers hear “the dividing wall of hostility” as a metaphor and file it with other religious imagery. It was not a metaphor. It was a four-foot stone barrier in Herod’s temple — the *soreg* — posted with Greek inscriptions warning that any Gentile who passed it would be put to death. Archaeologists have recovered fragments of those very inscriptions. Some of Paul’s Ephesian readers had stood on the wrong side of that wall and read that warning with their own eyes. If you make the wall physical before you make it theological, the words *He has broken down the dividing wall* will land in your classroom as demolition, not decoration.

One more gift this passage hands the Lutheran teacher: its closing verses build the Church on *the foundation of the apostles and prophets* — the apostolic Word — with Christ as cornerstone, and they set up the Augsburg Confession’s definition of the Church as cleanly as any passage in Scripture. Session Five is quietly one of the most ecclesiological hours of the study. Teach it with joy; it is a homecoming passage.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The wall between Jew and Gentile was real — stone in the temple, ceremonial law in daily life — and Christ has demolished it in His flesh, creating in Himself one new man in place of the two, so that all believers now share one access to the Father, one citizenship, one household, and one rising temple built on the apostolic Word with Christ as cornerstone.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Five of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 2:11–22 slowly, several times, marking the *once / but now* contrasts. The passage's structure is a before-and-after, and your teaching should move the way it moves.
- ♦ Read Acts 21:27–36 — the riot that led to Paul's arrest. The mob accused him of bringing Trophimus *the Ephesian* past the temple barrier. Hold that for the irony it is: the man writing to Ephesus about the demolished wall is in chains, in part, over an Ephesian and that very wall.
- ♦ Read Isaiah 57:19 — *peace, peace, to the far and to the near* — the prophetic text behind verse 17.
- ♦ Review Augsburg Confession, Article VII: the Church is the assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. The temple image of verses 20–22 is this article's seedbed, and Question 6 will take the class straight to it.
- ♦ Pray — especially if your congregation carries any internal walls of its own. This passage has a way of finding them.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ A diagram or image of Herod's temple courts — Court of the Gentiles, the *soreg*, the inner courts. Most study Bibles include one. If you can find a photograph of the recovered warning inscription (the Istanbul fragment is widely reproduced), bring it; nothing teaches verse 14 faster.

- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list. Today's entries are corporate: made one in Him, created into one new man in Him, built together in Him, a dwelling place for God in Him.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **But now is the corporate but God.** Verses 11–12 give the Gentile *once* in five devastating phrases — separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth, strangers to the covenants, having no hope, without God in the world. Verse 13 answers with the same grammar as 2:4: *but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near* — and the means is named: *by the blood of Christ*. Horizontal reconciliation flows from vertical atonement; the wall comes down at the cross or it does not come down at all.
- ♦ **Peace is a Person.** Paul does not say Christ made peace, announced peace, or negotiated peace — though all are true. He says *He Himself is our peace*. Peace between God and man, and therefore between man and man, is not a condition to be maintained but a Person to be received. Where Christ is, the peace is; apart from Him, no technique manufactures it.
- ♦ **The ceremonial law fulfilled, the moral law standing.** Christ abolished *the law of commandments expressed in ordinances* — the ceremonial boundary system of circumcision, foods, festivals, and sacrifices that marked Jew off from Gentile. The Lutheran tradition is careful here: the ceremonial law is fulfilled and set aside in Christ; the moral law continues as the rule of the Christian's life. Collapse that distinction in either direction and you lose either the Gospel's freedom or the commandments' claim.
- ♦ **The Church built on the Word, defined by its marks.** The temple's foundation is *the apostles and prophets* — not the men as officeholders, nor a succession passed through offices, but the apostolic and prophetic *witness*, the inspired Word. Christ is the cornerstone determining every line of the building, and the building is people, not architecture: God, who once dwelt above the mercy seat, now dwells by His Spirit in the gathered believers. Wherever the Word is purely preached and the sacraments rightly given, there the temple is rising — Augsburg VII in apostolic stone.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Four
0:05–0:13	Remember what you were (vv. 11–12)

0:13–0:21	The dividing wall: the <i>soreg</i> and the ceremonial law
0:21–0:28	<i>But now in Christ</i> : brought near by the blood (v. 13)
0:28–0:37	Christ is our peace; one new man (vv. 14–16) — the heart
0:37–0:44	Peace preached; access in one Spirit (vv. 17–18)
0:44–0:52	Citizens, household, and the temple on the cornerstone (vv. 19–22)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 6 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, the wall itself — make it stone, inscription, and death penalty before you let Christ demolish it; the whole passage trades on its reality. Second, verses 14 through 16 — *He Himself is our peace... one new man* — because this is the passage's christological center and the place where the class must see that unity is not an achievement of the Church but a creation of the cross.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Remember What You Were

Open by reading the whole passage aloud, then return to the command that begins it: *therefore remember*. Paul asks the Gentile believers to rehearse their former condition, and he gives it to them in five descending phrases — separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, without God in the world. Read the five slowly. The last two are the floor: no hope, no God.

Make the student book's careful point: the Ephesians had not been *less-developed* worshippers of the same God, gradually groping their way toward Him. Their religious world — Artemis, the magicians, the mysteries — was not a staircase to the God of Abraham; it was alienation from Him. They were not on the way. They were outside. By sheer grace, they are inside now — and remembering the outside is what keeps grace tasting like grace. Question 1 will press this devotionally.

The Dividing Wall

Now build the wall. First the daily-life version: the Mosaic ceremonial system marked Israel off from the nations in a hundred visible ways — circumcision, Sabbath, foods, festivals, temple. Every meal and every week reminded the Jew he was set apart and showed the Gentile he was not. There were God-fearers at the synagogue's edge and the rare full proselyte, but there was no halfway; the boundary held.

Then the stone version. In Herod's temple, the separation was physical: beyond the Court of the Gentiles stood the *soreg*, a four-foot stone barrier, posted in Greek with the warning that any Gentile passing it would bear the responsibility for his ensuing death. Fragments of those inscriptions sit in museums today — show the picture if you brought one. Some of Paul's own readers had stood at that barrier and gone no further.

Then the irony your preparation reading uncovered: when Paul was seized in Jerusalem, the accusation was that he had taken Trophimus — an Ephesian — past that wall (Acts 21). The apostle writing this letter is in chains over precisely this issue, to the very congregation that knows Trophimus by name. The wall is not an illustration in this letter. It is the letter's biography.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Make the wall real before you make it theological. Stone, inscription, death penalty, a named Ephesian nearly killed over it — build it until your students can feel its weight. Only then read verse 14: *He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility*. If the wall is a metaphor, its demolition is a sentiment. If the wall is real, its demolition is news — and every wall your students are tempted to rebuild inside the Church stands condemned by the rubble of the first one.

But Now in Christ

Verse 13 is the hinge, and your class has seen this grammar before. *But God* raised the dead in 2:4; *but now in Christ Jesus* gathers the far-off in 2:13. Same mercy, wider lens. And mark the means: *brought near by the blood of Christ*. Not by Gentile improvement, not by Jewish concession, not by interfaith goodwill — by blood. The horizontal reconciliation of verse 13 has exactly one source, and it is the vertical atonement of the cross. Every later application of this passage stands or falls on keeping that order.

Christ Is Our Peace; One New Man

The heart of the session. Begin with the pronoun: *He Himself is our peace*. Not “He made peace,” though He did. Peace, in the Gospel, is finally not a condition, a treaty, or an atmosphere — it is a Person. Where Christ is received, peace exists; where He is refused, no diplomacy can conjure it. Let Question 4 sit in reserve here.

Then the demolition and the creation. He *broke down* the wall, *abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances* — the ceremonial boundary system, fulfilled and retired in Him. (Pause for the Lutheran distinction, because Question 3 depends on it: ceremonial law fulfilled and set aside; moral law standing as the rule of life. Lose the distinction one way and the Ten Commandments fall with the food laws; lose it the other way and the wall goes back up.) And the purpose: *that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two*. Not Gentiles upgraded into Jews; not Jews diluted into Gentiles; a third thing — a new humanity. Jewish believers like Paul still lived much of their Jewish pattern, but their deepest identity, like the Gentiles', was now the new creation. The Church is not a coalition of the old categories. It is a new category.

Peace Preached; Access in One Spirit

Verses 17 and 18 tell how the accomplished peace reaches people: it is *preached* — to the far (Gentiles) and the near (Jews) alike, in Isaiah's own words. The cross achieves; the Word delivers. Your students should hear the means-of-grace pattern by now; it has run through every session.

And the result is *access* — *prosagōgē*, the word for being ushered into the presence of a king. Not the outer courts; the throne room. The access the high priest had one day a year, the ordinary Gentile believer now has every day. Mark the Trinitarian shape and give it to your students as the shape of their own prayers: *through Him* — the Son; *in one Spirit*; *to the Father*. And mark the word *both*: one access, no second-class entrance, no inner court reserved by ethnicity or pedigree. The student book puts it unforgettably — theologically speaking, the Court of the Gentiles has been merged with the Holy of Holies in Christ.

Citizens, Household, Temple

Verse 19 shifts from distance to belonging, in two stacked images: *fellow citizens with the saints* — full standing in the kingdom, the same commonwealth they were once alienated from — and *members of the household of God* — not civic standing only, but a chair at the family table. Kingdom and household; Christ the King and God the Father; the believer both citizen and child. Pause for the pastoral consolation: the student who feels at home nowhere has, in Christ, joined the deepest household there is.

Then the closing image, one of the richest in the New Testament: the household becomes a temple under construction. The foundation is *the apostles and prophets* — and teach the Lutheran precision here: not the men as a succession, but their *witness*, the inspired Word. The Church stands on Scripture or it stands on nothing. Christ Jesus Himself is the *cornerstone* — the stone that sets every angle of the building. And the building is people: the God who dwelt above the mercy seat now dwells by His Spirit in the gathered believers. The Jerusalem temple, courts and veil and all, is fulfilled — and your students, joined together in Christ, are what it pointed to. *A dwelling place for God by the Spirit* is not a compliment to the Church. It is its definition.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student asks how to recognize the true Church — amid denominations, scandals, and shrinking rolls — take them to the foundation Paul just named and let Augsburg VII translate it: the Church is the assembly of believers where the Gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. Not size, not heritage, not programming, not the building. Word and Sacrament are the marks because they are the foundation and cornerstone doing their work. This frees your students from anxiety about the Church's visible fortunes — and presses them toward the one question that matters about any congregation: is Christ's Word sounding there, and His gifts given?



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. This passage generates strong feelings about church divisions; choose the question your particular class can handle honestly without wounding itself.

Question 1 — Why remember what you were

The devotional opener. Remembering the *once* is what keeps grace from curdling into entitlement; forgetting it is the first step of the drift this letter exists to arrest. Invite concrete answers to the second half — where forgetting actually happens — and expect some quiet honesty.

Question 2 — What walls divide Christians today

The most energetic question, and the one needing the firmest hand. Keep it on walls *within* the Church — ethnic, class, generational, stylistic — and explicitly off partisan politics. The sub-question is the rescue: which of these has Christ *already in principle* torn down? The answer — all of them — turns lament into agenda.

Question 3 — Ceremonial law versus moral law

The doctrinal question, best for a class that enjoys precision. Walk both failure modes: collapse the distinction one way and Christians are keeping kosher; collapse it the other and the Ten Commandments retire with the festival calendar. The distinction protects both the Gospel's freedom and the law's continuing claim.

Question 4 — Peace as a Person

The christological question, and accessible to everyone. Most students think of peace as circumstances behaving or feelings settling; verse 14 relocates it entirely. Ask the follow-up: what does it mean for your conflicts that peace is someone who can be *present*?

Question 5 — The one new man, experienced and resisted

The testimony question. Stories of unlikely fellowship — believers across race, class, and nation discovering one identity — are this doctrine made visible; let them be told. The second half requires more courage: where do the old divisions reassert themselves among us? Do not rush past it.

Question 6 — The Augsburg definition of the Church

The confessional question and the session's natural summit. Most people — including many members — mean by “church” a building, a brand, or a vibe. AC VII's definition frees students from anxiety over numbers and aesthetics, and presses them toward Word and Sacrament as the only vital signs. A rich closing conversation for a Lutheran class.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Five, consider Question 4 — peace as a Person. It sits at the exact center of the passage, it requires no background and risks no church-politics detour, and it sends every student home with a changed definition of a word they use daily. Question 6 is the strong alternative for a confessionally minded class, especially one anxious about the visible Church's fortunes; few conversations steady that anxiety like an hour with Augsburg VII.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ The *soreg* made real — stone, inscription, penalty — even in three minutes. The demolition needs the wall. Never cut this.
- ♦ *But now in Christ... by the blood* (v. 13). The hinge, and the order: vertical atonement before horizontal reconciliation.
- ♦ Verses 14–16: He Himself is our peace; one new man in place of the two.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 4.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 6 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The God-fearers and proselytes background. One sentence: there was no halfway across this boundary.
- ♦ The Trophimus irony. A footnote if time allows; the wall stands without it.
- ♦ The *prosagōgē* word study. Keep the throne-room image; drop the vocabulary.
- ♦ The citizen/household pair. Choose the household image and let it carry the belonging.
- ♦ The foundation discussion. One sentence — the Word of prophets and apostles, with Christ the cornerstone — and let the catechism finish the teaching another day.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be verse 14 with the rubble still settling: *He Himself is our peace*, and the wall — the real, stone, death-penalty wall — is down. The unity of the Church is not a goal the Church pursues but a fact the cross created, which believers are called to stop contradicting. A student who grasps that has the whole passage.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Acts 21:27–36.** The Jerusalem riot — Paul seized on the charge of taking Trophimus the Ephesian past the temple barrier. The biographical backdrop that turns this passage from doctrine into testimony.
- ♦ **Isaiah 57:19.** *Peace, peace, to the far and to the near.* The prophetic word Paul quotes in verse 17; reading it in context shows how deliberately he reaches for it.
- ♦ **Galatians 3:23–29.** Neither Jew nor Greek, one in Christ Jesus — Paul's earlier, sharper-edged statement of the same new creation, forged in controversy rather than calm.
- ♦ **Acts 10.** Cornelius. The narrative where the wall first visibly cracks: *God shows no partiality*. The story your students should hear behind every verse of this passage.
- ♦ **1 Peter 2:4–10.** Living stones, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. The other great apostolic temple-building passage — and familiar ground for any student who has studied First Peter with this series' predecessor.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Article VII, with Apology VII/VIII.** The Church defined by its marks — Gospel purely preached, sacraments rightly administered. The confessional translation of verses 19–22, and the backbone of Question 6.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Creed, Third Article.** Luther on the communion of saints — the Spirit gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying the whole Christian Church on earth. The household of verse 19 in catechetical voice.
- ♦ **Formula of Concord, Articles V and VI.** Law and Gospel, and the third use of the law — the mature confessional treatment behind the ceremonial/moral distinction your class will meet in Question 3.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Excellent on the temple imagery and its liturgical afterlife — why this passage echoes through the Church's hymnody and rites.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Strong, warm pages on the one new man and on the foundation as the prophetic-apostolic Word.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Thorough historical material on the *soreg*, the inscriptions, and first-century Jew-Gentile relations — the factual ballast for your wall-building.

A Final Word

You are teaching a demolition this week, and demolitions are good news only to people who have honestly looked at the wall. Build it patiently — the stone, the warning, the centuries of separation — and then let the cross bring it down in front of the class. The order is the sermon.

And expect this passage to do quiet work close to home. Every congregation has its own small *soregs* — the pews that belong to certain families, the unspoken sortings by age or income or tenure. You do not need to name them from the front; the text names them. Teach the one new man plainly, and let the Spirit handle the applications He has prepared for your particular room.

Next week, Paul interrupts himself. He begins to pray, pauses to explain the mystery entrusted to him — the Gentiles as fellow heirs, the reason for his chains — and then finishes with perhaps the deepest prayer in all his letters: strength in the inner being, Christ dwelling in the heart, the breadth and length and height and depth of a love that surpasses

knowledge, and a doxology that closes the entire first half of the letter. Ephesians 3 is the summit of the doctrinal chapters. Read it twice, and come rested.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may the peace who is a Person preside over your classroom.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SIX

The Mystery and the Prayer

Ephesians 3:1–21

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Six. You stand this week at the summit of the letter's doctrinal half. Chapter three is really two acts joined by an interruption: Paul begins to pray (*for this reason I, Paul...*), breaks off mid-sentence to explain the mystery entrusted to him and the meaning of his chains, and then resumes at verse 14 with what may be the deepest prayer in all his letters — strength in the inner being, Christ dwelling in the heart, the four dimensions of a love that surpasses knowledge — before sealing the whole first half of Ephesians with a doxology.

Two teaching opportunities make this session special. First, verse 1 gives the letter's first explicit mention of the chains: *a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles*. Paul does not apologize for the chains or explain them away; he owns them theologically, as part of his stewardship — and verse 13 even calls his sufferings the Ephesians' *glory*. The prison frame you built in Session One comes home this week. Second, verse 10 makes one of the most extraordinary claims in Paul: the Church exists so that *the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*. Your students' ordinary congregation — the widow at her pew, the toddler mid-wrestle, the third stanza sung slightly flat — is, in the eyes of the heavenly hosts, the theater of God's wisdom. Teach that claim straight, and no one in your room will think of Sunday morning the same way again.

End the hour the way Paul ends the chapter: in actual doxology. This is the rare session that should close in praise rather than summary.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The mystery hidden for ages — Gentiles as fellow heirs in one body — has been revealed through the apostolic Word and put on display in the Church before the watching powers of heaven, and Paul's response is to kneel and pray that Christ would dwell in His people's hearts, rooting them in a love whose breadth and length and height and depth surpass all knowing.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Six of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 3:1–21 slowly, several times — and notice the interruption. Verse 1 breaks off; verse 14 picks the sentence back up. The digression of verses 2–13 is not a detour but the credentials for the prayer.
- ♦ Read Acts 9:1–19. The steward of the mystery was once its persecutor; the Damascus road is the biography behind *the very least of all the saints*.
- ♦ Read Colossians 1:24–2:3 — the sibling letter's parallel treatment of the mystery, suffering, and *Christ in you*. (Students who continue to this series' third volume will live in that passage; you are laying its foundation now.)
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism's introduction to the Lord's Prayer — *with all boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear father*. That explanation is Ephesians 3:12 in catechetical form, and you will want the connection ready.
- ♦ Pray the prayer of verses 16–19 for your class by name — and ask someone to pray it for *you*. The teacher needs the inner strengthening too, and the asking is not a formality this week.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list. Today's entries go inward and upward: Christ dwelling in the heart through faith; the Church in Him as the display of God's wisdom.
- ♦ A whiteboard sketch of the chapter's shape — *PRAYER BEGUN* (v. 1) → *THE MYSTERY* (vv. 2–13) → *PRAYER RESUMED* (vv. 14–19) → *DOXOLOGY* (vv. 20–21). The interruption confuses readers; one diagram dissolves the confusion.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The Gospel comes by revelation, not by reason.** The mystery was made known to Paul *by apokalypsis* — unveiling — not by study or speculation. The natural mind, however cultivated, cannot reach the Gospel from below; it descends from above. And it was revealed *to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*: through their inspired witness — the Scriptures — every later age receives what they were shown. The Church does not add to that witness or subtract from it. This is sola Scriptura in its native habitat.
- ♦ **The Church is the theater of God's wisdom.** *Polypoikilos sophia* — many-colored, richly patterned wisdom — is being displayed *through the Church* to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. The angels learn God's wisdom by watching Jew and Gentile reconciled, sinners forgiven, the household built. There are therefore no insignificant Christians and no overlooked congregations; the cosmic significance of the Church is assigned by God's own purpose, not by attendance figures.
- ♦ **Christ dwells; He does not visit.** *That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith* is the biblical root of what the Lutheran tradition calls the *unio mystica* — the mystical union of the believer with Christ. The indwelling is real, personal, and permanent — and it comes *through faith*, which comes through the Word. The nearness of God is therefore not found by chasing feelings but received through the means He has appointed.
- ♦ **Grounded in love, not in resolve.** Rooted (agriculture) and grounded (architecture) — and in both images, the soil and the bedrock are the love of God, not the believer's moral effort. The four dimensions name love's inexhaustible reach; the paradox of verse 19 — *to know the love that surpasses knowledge* — means the comprehension is real but never finished. The believer is unshakeable not because he is strong but because the love is.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Five
0:05–0:12	The interrupted prayer; prisoner on behalf of you Gentiles (v. 1)
0:12–0:21	Steward of the mystery; revelation, not reason (vv. 2–6)

0:21–0:27	The very least of all the saints (vv. 7–9)
0:27–0:35	The manifold wisdom: the Church as cosmic theater (vv. 10–13)
0:35–0:42	I bow my knees; strengthened in the inner being (vv. 14–17a)
0:42–0:50	Rooted and grounded; the four dimensions (vv. 17b–19) — the heart
0:50–0:54	The doxology, read together (vv. 20–21)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 7 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, the theater claim of verse 10 — the Church displaying God's wisdom to the watching powers — because it permanently reframes ordinary congregational life, and most students have never once heard it. Second, the resumed prayer of verses 16–19 — the indwelling Christ and the four dimensions of love — because this is what the whole doctrinal half of the letter has been climbing toward.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The Interrupted Prayer; The Chains Owned

Open by reading the whole chapter aloud — it takes about three minutes and the doxology rewards hearing. Then show the class the seam: verse 1 begins a sentence that verse 14 finishes. Paul interrupts himself for thirteen verses, and the interruption is not absent-mindedness; he cannot pray for the Gentiles without first dwelling on the stewardship that makes him their intercessor. Question 1 lives in that observation.

And mark how verse 1 names him: *a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles*. This is the letter's first explicit mention of the chains, and Paul wears them as credentials, not embarrassment. He is in prison precisely because of his Gentile mission — your class met Trophimus and the temple riot last week — and so the chains are, in a real sense, *for* the Ephesians. Verse 13 completes the thought: *do not lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory*. Suffering in vocation, rightly understood, is not the interruption of

service; it can be the form service takes. Question 2 will let students test that against their own histories.

Steward of the Mystery

Two Greek words carry verses 2–6, and both are worth giving the class. *Oikonomia* — stewardship, the word behind our “economy” — was the management of a household entrusted to a servant. The grace of God for the Gentiles is the treasure; Paul is the household manager. The Gospel he dispenses is not his own.

And the mystery reached him by *apokalypsis* — unveiling. Not study, not accumulated wisdom, not religious genius: revelation. Make the Lutheran point cleanly: the Gospel comes by revelation, not by reason. The natural mind cannot climb to it; it must descend. The Old Testament prophets glimpsed the nations coming to the light, but the full picture — Gentiles as *fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise* — waited for Christ and was revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets. Then draw the line to your students' laps: through the inspired writings of those apostles and prophets, the same mystery reaches every age. The Bible on the table is not humanity's guesses about God; it is the apostolic witness to the revealed mystery — received, treasured, expounded, never amended. *Sola Scriptura* is not a Reformation slogan bolted onto this text. It is this text.

The Very Least of All the Saints

Verses 7–9 give the steward's self-assessment, and it is worth pausing on: *the very least of all the saints*. The man entrusted with the unsearchable riches of Christ never forgot he had persecuted the Church that now received his ministry. The grace that met him on the Damascus road set the permanent shape of his self-understanding — gifted beyond measure, deserving none of it. Offer your class the pattern: the surest mark of someone who has grasped grace is that the grasping never curdles into entitlement. Keep this section brief; its fragrance matters more than its length.

The Manifold Wisdom: The Church as Cosmic Theater

Now the extraordinary claim. Read verse 10 slowly, twice: God's plan was *that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*. The Church exists, in part, as a demonstration — to the angelic hosts and the principalities — of a wisdom they could not otherwise see.

Give them the word: *polypoikilos* — many-colored, variegated, richly patterned. God's wisdom is not a single thread but a tapestry, and the Church is where the full pattern goes on display. Luther loved to call creation the *theatrum gloriae Dei*, the theater of God's glory; Paul narrows the lens — the *Church* is the theater where this many-colored wisdom is shown to the watching powers.

Then make it local, the way the student book does. The Sunday gathering of your own congregation — the elderly widow at her pew, the young family wrestling a toddler, the

convert two months into the faith, the lifelong member on the third stanza — *that assembly* is, in the eyes of the heavenly hosts, the unveiling of the manifold wisdom of God. There are no insignificant Christians. There are no overlooked congregations. The Church does not feel like a cosmic theater from the inside; Paul insists it is one anyway. And note where the paragraph lands: in Him we have *boldness and access with confidence* — your students will hear the Small Catechism's "boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear father." That is no accident; Luther got it here.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Do not teach this chapter as information; teach it as ascent, and end where Paul ends — in praise. When you reach verses 20 and 21, have the class read the doxology aloud together: *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think... to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* Three chapters of pure gift deserve to close in worship rather than summary, and a class that has *prayed* the doxology owns the doctrinal half of this letter in a way no recap can match.

I Bow My Knees; Strengthened in the Inner Being

Verse 14 resumes the sentence: *for this reason I bow my knees before the Father*. The posture is the teaching — a chained man, Roman guard at his side, kneeling. The guard cannot stop the prayer, and likely does not even understand it. And he kneels before the Father *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named* — all fatherhood, all belonging, derives from this Father.

The first petition: strength *according to the riches of His glory*, with power *through His Spirit in your inner being*. Mark the measure — not according to what the Ephesians can muster, but according to God's wealth. The strength in view is not muscle but the hidden sturdiness of faith: strength to bear suffering, courage to confess Christ, endurance for the long ordinary middle. It is the strength your students actually need on Tuesdays, and it is asked for, not achieved.

Christ Dwelling; Rooted and Grounded in Love

The second petition is the deepest sentence in the chapter: *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*. Press the verb. Dwell — not visit, not drop by on Sundays, not appear when summoned by strong feelings. The Lutheran tradition names this the *unio mystica*, the mystical union: the believer is not merely pardoned from a distance but personally indwelt by the living Christ. And the door is named — *through faith* — which means the indwelling is sustained the way faith is sustained: by the Word and the Sacraments, not by spiritual athletics.

Then the two metaphors: *rooted* (the tree whose taproot no wind can pull) *and grounded* (the building whose footing no storm can shake) — *in love*. The soil is love; the bedrock is love. Say the radical part plainly: the Christian's life is not finally grounded in his own resolve, his own moral effort, his own spiritual achievement, but in the love of God toward him. He is unshakeable not because he is strong but because the love is.

And the four dimensions — *breadth and length and height and depth* — measuring nothing named, because they measure the unmeasurable. Augustine charmingly mapped them onto the four extensions of the cross; the Lutheran reading is broader: the totality of Christ's love, inexhaustible in every direction, comprehended *with all the saints* (never alone) — and then the paradox: *to know the love that surpasses knowledge*. The knowing is real; the love is always larger. The sixty-year saint and the two-month convert are both still measuring. That is not a frustration. It is the believer's future, guaranteed inexhaustible.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student says God feels distant — and in the long ordinary middle of faith, many quietly feel it — do not send them off to manufacture intensity. Take them to verse 17: Christ *dwells* in the heart through faith, and faith is fed at the means of grace. The question is never “how do I get Christ to come near?” but “where has He promised to be?” — and the answer is His Word, your Baptism, His Supper. Feelings of nearness ebb and flow; the indwelling does not. This single reframe has steadied more dry seasons than any devotional technique ever invented.

To Him Be Glory

The doxology closes the doctrinal half, and its superlatives are earned: *able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us*. Note where the power is at work — *within us* — the same indwelling the prayer just asked for. And note where the glory lives: *in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations*. The theater of verse 10 returns as the choir of verse 21. Read it aloud together, as the teaching move above suggests, and let the *Amen* land.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. After a session this rich, one unhurried question will serve better than two rushed ones.

Question 1 — Paul's interruption and the praying mind

A gentle, observational opener. Paul cannot pray for the Gentiles without dwelling on his own calling first; many students will recognize the pattern of digression-that-isn't-really-digression in their own prayers. Good for a slow-warming class.

Question 2 — Setbacks that became service

The vocational testimony question. Paul owns his chains as credentials; students are invited to reread their own apparent derailments — illness, job loss, a move they never wanted — as, it turned out, part of the assignment. Expect a few quietly powerful answers, and don't rush them.

Question 3 — The angels are watching

The reframing question, and usually the most energizing of the set. How does congregational life change when the gathering is a cosmic theater? Push past the novelty to the implications: no insignificant members, no wasted Sundays, no "just" a small church. This question can permanently alter how a class talks about its own congregation.

Question 4 — Christ dwells, not visits

The confessional question on the *unio mystica*. The contrast with popular religion's distant deity — or its on-demand emotional one — gives the conversation its edge. Steer toward the means of grace as where the indwelling is fed; do not let it drift into competitive testimonies of spiritual experience.

Question 5 — Where are your roots sunk?

The practical formation question. Students name the practices, relationships, and disciplines through which they have grown downward into the love of God. Useful for letting veterans quietly mentor newcomers — the answers are a syllabus of Lutheran piety offered by the class to itself.

Question 6 — Asking too small

The prayer question, keyed to the doxology. Testimonies of God doing more than was asked; honest confession of prayers pre-shrunk by low expectations. A warm closing conversation, and one that sends students home with the doxology still ringing.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Six, consider Question 3 — the angels are watching. It engages the passage's most startling claim, it requires no personal disclosure, and it does permanent work: a class that has internalized verse 10 never again calls itself “just” a small congregation. Question 5 is the strong alternative if your class skews toward practical formation — the rooted-and-grounded conversation doubles as a gentle inventory of the means of grace in your students' actual weeks.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ The chains owned theologically (vv. 1, 13) — prisoner *on behalf of you Gentiles*; suffering as your glory. The prison frame of the whole study runs through here. Never cut this.
- ♦ Revelation, not reason (vv. 3–5), compressed — the Gospel descends; Scripture is the apostolic witness to it.
- ♦ The theater claim of verse 10, made local to your own congregation.
- ♦ The resumed prayer (vv. 16–19): inner strength, the indwelling Christ, rooted and grounded in love.
- ♦ The doxology read aloud together, one discussion question (likely Question 3), closing prayer, and the Session 7 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The *oikonomia* word study. Keep “household manager of God's grace” in one sentence.
- ♦ *The very least of all the saints*. One sentence: the steward never forgot the Damascus road.
- ♦ *Every family in heaven and on earth named*. A footnote.
- ♦ Augustine's cross-shaped reading of the four dimensions. Charming, skippable.
- ♦ The know-surpassing-knowledge paradox. Compress to one line: the knowing is real; the love is always larger.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the petition of verse 17 with its Lutheran depth: Christ *dwells* in the believer's heart through faith — and the believer is therefore grounded not in his own resolve but in a love whose dimensions outrun all measuring. A student who carries that sentence home has received the summit of the letter's doctrinal half.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ **Acts 9:1–19.** The Damascus road. The steward of the mystery was its persecutor; this narrative is the autobiography compressed inside *the very least of all the saints*.
- ◆ **Romans 16:25–27.** Paul's other doxology of the mystery *kept secret for long ages* and now disclosed. The closest parallel in Paul to this chapter's frame.
- ◆ **Colossians 1:24–2:3.** Suffering for the Church, the mystery made known, *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. The sibling letter's treatment — and the seedbed of this series' third volume.
- ◆ **John 14:23.** *We will come to him and make Our home with him.* Jesus' own promise of the indwelling that Paul prays for in verse 17.
- ◆ **Romans 11:33–36.** *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!* The other great Pauline eruption into doxology when the mystery comes fully into view.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ **Small Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, Introduction.** *With all boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear father.* Ephesians 3:12 in catechetical form — the access and boldness of the mystery applied to every Christian's praying.
- ◆ **Formula of Concord, Article III.** The righteousness of faith — including the careful distinction between justification and the indwelling of God that follows it. The precision your class needs if Question 4 goes deep: the *unio mystica* is real, but it is the fruit of justification, never its ground.
- ◆ **Luther, A Simple Way to Pray.** Luther's little manual for his barber. The kneeling prisoner of verse 14 and the reformer's plain instructions belong to the same school of prayer, and the pamphlet is short enough to read in one sitting.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Strong on the chapter's liturgical doxology and on the *unio mystica* with proper Lutheran guardrails.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** His treatment of the prayer is devotional exegesis at its best — old Missouri on its knees.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Detailed on the grammar of the interrupted sentence and the syntax of verses 14–19 — useful for keeping the petitions in their actual order.

A Final Word

You close the doctrinal half of Ephesians this week, and it is worth feeling the size of what your class has covered: chosen before the foundation of the world, sealed with the Spirit, raised from the dead, seated in the heavenly places, made one new man, built into a temple, indwelt by Christ, rooted in immeasurable love. Three chapters, and not one imperative addressed to your students yet. That is not an oversight. It is the architecture of the Gospel — and next week the *therefore* arrives.

Before it does, let this session do its quiet work on you as well. Teachers spend so many hours asking God to strengthen others that they forget the prayer has their own name in it too. Be strengthened in your inner being. You are halfway home.

Next week, the hinge of the letter: Ephesians 4:1–16. *Therefore walk in a manner worthy of the calling* — the turn from what God has done to what the Christian therefore does, the seven great *ones* of the faith, and the gifts of the ascended Christ given to grow the body to the full stature of its Head. Read it twice, and pay attention to that opening *therefore*; everything you have taught for six weeks is folded inside it.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all you ask or think — to Him be glory in your classroom too.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SEVEN

One Body, One Spirit

Ephesians 4:1–16

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Seven. This week your class crosses the hinge of the letter — one Greek word, *oun*, *therefore*, on which everything turns. Three chapters of pure indicative are behind you: chosen, redeemed, sealed, made alive, seated, indwelt. Now comes the first sustained imperative of the letter: *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*. From here to the end of the study, Paul describes the life that flows from the gift. The order is the theology, and guarding that order is your chief assignment this week — and every remaining week.

Say it to yourself before you say it to them: the walking does not earn the calling; it answers it. Your students have spent six sessions hearing what God has done precisely so that the next five sessions of *therefore* cannot be mistaken for a ladder back into works-righteousness. Whenever the second half of Ephesians threatens to float free of the first half, your job is to reattach it — out loud, repeatedly, without apology.

The passage also hands the Lutheran teacher two treasures: the seven *ones* of verses 4–6, which teach that the Church's unity is given, not manufactured — maintained, never made — and the gifts of verse 11, where the ascended Christ gives shepherds and teachers to His Church. Augsburg Confession Article V stands on this ground, and your students' relationship to their own pastor may quietly change by the end of the hour.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Therefore turns the letter from gift to response: the Christian walks worthy of a calling already received, maintaining — through humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance — a unity already given in the seven *ones*, while the ascended Christ supplies His Church with shepherd-teachers to equip the saints and grow the whole body, in truth and love, up into its Head.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Seven of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 4:1–16 slowly, several times. Mark the *therefore* in verse 1 and trace what it points back to — it carries all three previous chapters on its back.
- ♦ Read Psalm 68, especially verse 18, which Paul quotes in verse 8. Seeing the psalm whole will help you handle the ascent-and-descent exposition without getting lost in it.
- ♦ Read Philippians 2:1–11. The humility of verse 2 has its deepest root in the Christ who emptied Himself — and students who continue to this series' second volume will spend a whole session there.
- ♦ Review Augsburg Confession, Articles V and XIV — the office of the ministry instituted by God, and the requirement of a rightful call. Verse 11 is home soil for both.
- ♦ Pray for your own pastor by name this week. You are about to teach that he is Christ's gift to your congregation; it will preach better if you have prayed it first.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list — and space beside it for the seven *ones* written vertically: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. The column itself is a creed.
- ♦ A simple sketch of the letter's architecture: *CHAPTERS 1–3: WHAT GOD HAS DONE* → *"THEREFORE"* → *CHAPTERS 4–6: HOW WE THEREFORE WALK*. This diagram will serve every remaining session; consider leaving it visible for the rest of the study.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The great *therefore*: indicative before imperative.** Doctrine first, then life — never reversed. Christians who attempt the worthy walk without first hearing what God has done turn Christianity into moralism and collapse under it; Christians who hear the indicative without the *therefore* mistake grace for permission to drift. The hinge holds both halves together, in order.
- ♦ **Unity is maintained, not made.** Paul says *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit* — not to create it. The unity already exists, given in the seven *ones*; the believer's task is to stop contradicting it. The instruments of maintenance are the quiet virtues: *tapeinophrosynē* (lowliness of mind, despised by the Greco-Roman world and dignified by the self-emptying Christ), *prautēs* (the strength that holds back from harm it could inflict), *makrothymia* (the long temper that absorbs friction without retaliation), and forbearance in love.
- ♦ **The pastor is Christ's gift.** The ascended Christ *gave* apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. The apostles and prophets were foundational — their inspired witness is the New Testament, and those offices are not perpetuated. The shepherd-teacher office continues: AC V confesses that God instituted the office of the ministry so that the Gospel may be preached and the sacraments given; AC XIV adds the rightful call. The pastor is not a religious entrepreneur or the elected manager of a voluntary association. He is a gift from the throne.
- ♦ **Truth in love is the body's growth medium.** Equipped saints grow to *mature manhood*, *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* — and the immature alternative is the boat tossed by every wind of doctrine. The remedy for drift is not less doctrine but more apostolic doctrine carefully taught; and the manner is *speaking the truth in love* — truth without love grows hard and brittle; love without truth grows soft and confused. Maturity is both, in a single act, growing up into the Head.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and review: the doctrinal half in one minute
0:05–0:13	The great <i>therefore</i> : walk worthy (v. 1)

0:13–0:22	The quiet virtues: humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance (vv. 2–3)
0:22–0:30	The seven <i>ones</i> : unity given, not made (vv. 4–6) — the heart
0:30–0:36	Ascended and descended: the giving Christ (vv. 7–10)
0:36–0:45	The gifts: the office of the ministry (vv. 11–12)
0:45–0:52	Maturity, the winds, and truth in love (vv. 13–16)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 8 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, the *therefore* itself — the class must feel the weight of the hinge, because every remaining session depends on the order it establishes. Second, the seven *ones* and the phrase *eager to maintain* — the discovery that unity is a gift to be kept, not a project to be engineered, reframes every conversation your students will ever have about church division.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The Great Therefore

Open by reading the whole passage aloud. Then go back to the first word and stop. *Therefore*. Ask the class what it points back to — and make them answer with specifics: chosen before the foundation of the world, redeemed by His blood, sealed with the Spirit, made alive from the dead, seated in the heavenly places, made one new man, indwelt by Christ. All of it is folded inside this one word. Paul has not asked the Ephesians to do anything for three chapters; now, with the whole gift on the table, he says: *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*.

Press the grammar of *worthy*. The calling came first; the walk answers it. A bride does not walk down the aisle to earn the proposal. The walking corresponds to the calling the way a life corresponds to a gift that has redefined it. And notice who urges it: *I, a prisoner for the Lord* — the chains lending weight the way only chains can.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Do not let a single imperative in the rest of this study float free of the indicative. This week, and every week from now on, physically point back — at your whiteboard diagram, at the first three chapters, at the font — before teaching what the Christian does. The moment the second half of Ephesians detaches from the first, it becomes moralism, and moralism is the precise drift this letter was written to prevent. The *therefore* is not a transition word. It is the load-bearing wall of Lutheran ethics, and you are its custodian for the next five sessions.

The Quiet Virtues

Verses 2 and 3 describe the worthy walk, and the first surprise is how unspectacular it is: *humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love*. Not heroics — the ordinary furniture of life together. Give each its brief due.

Tapeinophrosynē — lowliness of mind. The Greco-Roman world did not count this a virtue; lowliness was for slaves and the conquered, while the great-souled man knew his own excellence. Christianity overturned the table: in Christ, who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, humility became chief. The redeemed sinner cannot maintain an inflated self-estimate; he has been saved by sheer grace, and humility is simply that fact metabolized.

Prautēs — gentleness, sometimes meekness: the strength that holds back from inflicting harm even when it could. Its Christian root is not temperament but treatment — the believer has himself been handled gently by the God who could have crushed him, and gentleness is that mercy embodied in daily relations.

Makrothymia — literally long-tempered. Slow to flash, slow to take offense, slow to demand rights. The Lutheran tradition has prized this virtue for life together above almost any other, because proximity produces friction, and the Christian who can absorb friction without retaliation is doing more for congregational unity than any committee ever has.

And then the purpose clause that reframes everything: *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. Maintain — not invent, not negotiate, not construct. Underline the verb; the next section explains it.

The Seven Ones

Write them in a column and read them as the confession they are: *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*. The believer in Ephesus, the believer in Rome, the believer in Antioch — and the believers in your classroom — share one body, are sealed by one Spirit, await one hope, confess one Lord, hold one faith, were washed in one baptism, and call on one Father.

This is why unity is *maintained* and never *made*: it already exists, established by God in the sevenfold singularity of the faith itself. The Church does not build its unity by mergers, programs, or lowest-common-denominator statements; it receives its unity in Christ and is charged with not contradicting it. Division in the Church is therefore not a failure of construction but a denial of fact — believers living as if the seven *ones* were sevens. Let Question 3 carry the contemporary applications; your task here is to fix the principle.

Ascended and Descended

Verses 7–10 ground the coming gifts in the Giver. Grace is apportioned *according to the measure of Christ's gift*, and Paul reaches for Psalm 68 — the conquering king ascending in triumph, receiving and giving gifts. Then the exposition: the one who ascended is the one who first *descended into the lower regions* — a phrase interpreters have discussed at length (the descent into our humanity and the grave at minimum). Do not let the class wander into the debate; the student book's point is the preaching point: the Christ who gives gifts to the Church is the Christ who went all the way down before He went all the way up. His giving credentials are the incarnation and the cross. Two or three minutes here, then on to the gifts themselves.

The Gifts: The Office of the Ministry

And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers. Note the verb one more time: *gave*. The men who fill these offices are not self-appointed; they are presents from the throne of the ascended Lord.

Sort the list the way the student book does. Apostles and prophets were foundational — eyewitnesses of the risen Lord and vehicles of the Spirit's direct revelation; their inspired witness is the New Testament your students hold, and the foundation, once laid, is not relaid. There are no new apostles. The continuing gifts are the evangelist, who carries the message outward, and the shepherd-teacher — *poimēn*, the pastor — whom many Lutheran readers take as one office in its dual function: feeding the flock by preaching and teaching the Word.

Then make the confessional connection explicit. Augsburg Confession Article V: to obtain justifying faith, God instituted the office of the ministry — the Gospel preached, the sacraments administered. Article XIV: no one is to preach publicly or administer the sacraments without a rightful call. And the purpose clause of verse 12 keeps the office in its place: *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body*. The pastor is not the congregation's hired performer of religion while the members watch; he is the equipper, and the saints are the workforce.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When complaints about a pastor surface — and in every congregation they eventually do — verse 11 supplies the reframe that changes the conversation: the pastor is not an employee whose performance is reviewed, nor a politician whose coalition is managed, but a gift given by the ascended Christ for the congregation's good. Gifts can be received well or badly. This does not place pastors beyond accountability — the Confessions bind them tightly to the Word — but it relocates the relationship: the first response to Christ's gift is thanksgiving and prayer, not consumer evaluation. A class that internalizes this will treat its church's pastors differently for decades.

Maturity, the Winds, and Truth in Love

The gifts have a goal: *until we all attain... to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. The Church is being grown up — and the alternative is verse 14's vivid little seascape: children in a small boat, tossed by waves, carried by every wind of doctrine, pushed by human cunning and crafty schemes. No anchor, no helm, no heading.

Make the Lutheran observation without apology: the remedy for a wind-tossed Church is not less doctrine — the modern instinct — but more apostolic doctrine, taught more carefully, by pastors equipped for the work. Confessional integrity and patient catechesis are not Lutheran fussiness; they are verse 14's seamanship.

But the antidote is never bare doctrine. Verse 15 names the manner and the direction: *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ*. Truth without love grows hard and brittle, and people are wounded who should have been healed. Love without truth grows soft and confused, and people drift who should have been steadied. Maturity is both at once — and the body that holds them together, each part working properly, *builds itself up in love*. End the teaching on verse 16's quiet marvel: the body grows as every joint does its share. Including the people in your chairs.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. The hinge needs to be fixed firmly this week; favor the question that drives it home.

Question 1 — Why the order matters

The frame question, and this week's natural choice. Push for concrete answers to the second half: what actually happens when Christians attempt the worthy walk without the

indicative? (Exhaustion, pride, despair, performance religion — your class has seen all four.) This conversation inoculates the entire second half of the study against moralism.

Question 2 — The four virtues: easiest and hardest

The self-knowledge question, safe and fruitful in any class. The third part — which relationships need them most — quietly does the application work. Expect patience to win “hardest” by a wide margin, and let the class laugh about it.

Question 3 — Unity made versus maintained

The ecclesiology question. Rich, but steer carefully: the goal is the principle (unity is given in the seven *ones*), not an audit of specific denominations or your own congregation's history. The best fruit is the reframe itself — division as contradiction of fact rather than failure of effort.

Question 4 — The pastor as Christ's gift

The confessional application question. Handle with awareness of your room: in a class that loves its pastor, this deepens gratitude; in a congregation with recent conflict, it needs gentleness — the doctrine is not a shield for failings but a frame for the relationship. Either way, end in prayer for the men who hold the office among you.

Question 5 — The winds of doctrine today

The discernment question. Ask for winds, not villains — patterns and pressures rather than named teachers — and give equal weight to the second half: what practices (catechism, liturgy, regular preaching, the creeds) have actually anchored students against the gusts.

Question 6 — Truth in love, lost and held

The relational question, and quietly searching. Most students can name a conversation where truth arrived without love, or love capitulated without truth. The closing move is forward-looking: one current relationship where both could be held together this week.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Seven, consider Question 1 — the order of indicative and imperative. It is the hinge of the letter, the hinge of the study, and the hinge of Lutheran ethics, and a class that can articulate *why* the order matters will hear the next five sessions correctly without your having to police it. Question 2 is the gentle alternative for a class that prefers personal application to theological architecture.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ The *therefore*, with the class made to name what it points back to. The hinge of everything. Never cut this.
- ♦ *Eager to maintain* and the seven *ones* — unity given, not made.
- ♦ The pastor as Christ's gift (vv. 11–12), with AC V named, even in three minutes.
- ♦ *Speaking the truth in love* (v. 15) — the double remedy in one sentence.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 1.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 8 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Greek virtue word studies. Name the four virtues plainly; the etymologies can wait for another year.
- ♦ Psalm 68 and the descent-ascent exposition. One sentence: the Giver went all the way down before He went all the way up.
- ♦ The apostles-and-prophets-foundational discussion. One sentence: their witness is your New Testament; the office continuing among us is the shepherd-teacher.
- ♦ The mature-manhood development. Fold it into the winds: maturity is the anchored alternative.
- ♦ Verse 16's body mechanics. Keep only the final clause: the body builds itself up in love.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the order: the calling comes first, and the walking answers it — never the reverse. Every imperative in the rest of this letter hangs from that hinge, and a class that loses it will hear five weeks of law where Paul wrote five weeks of grateful response. Fix the order this week and you have protected the entire second half of the study.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Psalm 68.** The triumphal psalm behind verse 8 — the conquering King ascending and giving gifts. Reading it whole shows how boldly Paul applies it to the ascended Christ.
- ♦ **Philippians 2:1–11.** Humility grounded in the self-emptying of Christ — the deepest root of verse 2, and the heart of this series' second volume for students who continue.
- ♦ **John 17:20–23.** *That they may all be one.* The unity of the Church given in the Son's own prayer before it was ever assigned as the Church's task.
- ♦ **Romans 12:3–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.** Paul's other body passages — grace apportioned, many members, every part necessary. The anatomy behind verse 16.
- ♦ **Acts 20:28–31.** Paul to the Ephesian elders at Miletus: shepherd the flock, for fierce wolves will come. The same office, the same winds, the same congregation — a decade earlier.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Articles V and XIV.** The office of the ministry instituted by God, and the rightful call. The confessional architecture standing directly on verse 11.
- ♦ **Small Catechism, Table of Duties.** What the Scriptures say to pastors concerning their office — and to hearers concerning their pastors. The two-way street of verses 11–12 in household form, and the perfect companion to Question 4.
- ♦ **C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*.** The classic Missouri Synod treatment of congregation and office — the pastor as Christ's gift through the call of the Church. Heavier reading, but the definitive development of this session's confessional center.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Outstanding on verse 11 and the office of the ministry — Winger's treatment is itself a small confessional essay on the pastoral office.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Clear and warm on the seven *ones* and the maintained unity.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Detailed on the Psalm 68 quotation and the descent-ascent question — the place to send a student who wants the technical options laid out.

A Final Word

You cross the hinge this week, and how you cross it determines how the rest of the study lands. Taught rightly, the second half of Ephesians is the most liberating ethics in the world — the description of a life that has nothing left to earn and everything to express. Taught wrongly — cut loose from the *therefore* — the same chapters become a burden Paul never wrote. Guard the order. It is the most Lutheran thing you will do all year.

And let the seven *ones* steady you personally. The Church looks fractured from every headline, and teachers feel that fracture keenly. But the unity of the body is not finally in the Church's hands and never was; it is given, sevenfold, in the Spirit, and it will outlast every schism that contradicts it.

Next week, the worthy walk gets specific. Paul turns from the framework to the wardrobe: put off the old self, be renewed in the spirit of your minds, put on the new self created after the likeness of God — with named behaviors on both sides of the exchange, and the astonishing pastoral instruction not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:17–32 is where the study starts naming names. Read it twice, and read it on yourself first.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may the unity of the Spirit be maintained in your classroom in the bond of peace.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION EIGHT

The New Self

Ephesians 4:17–32

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Eight. Last week your class crossed the *therefore*; this week the worthy walk gets specific — and personal. Paul moves from the framework to the wardrobe: put off the old self, be renewed in the spirit of your minds, put on the new self. And then he names names: falsehood, anger, theft, rotten talk, bitterness, slander — alongside their replacements: truth, honest work, generous hands, words that give grace, kindness, and a forgiveness grounded in the forgiveness of God.

Two dangers attend this session, and they are opposites. The first is moralism: the moment the lists detach from the *therefore*, this passage becomes a self-improvement program, and self-improvement programs are precisely what your students' old Adam would prefer to the Gospel. The second is evasion: softening the specifics until no one in the room feels addressed. Paul names actual behaviors because the Ephesians — and your students — do actual things. The Lutheran path between the dangers is the one the student book takes: the daily baptismal exchange. The putting off and putting on is not a one-time conversion event or a lifetime achievement; it is the daily drowning of the old Adam by contrition and repentance and the daily rising of the new man — the Small Catechism's Fourth Part on Baptism, lived out loud. Keep the ethics baptismal and this session will comfort and convict in the right order.

One preparation note above all the others: read this passage on yourself before you teach it on anyone. The teacher who has spent the week with his own sundown anger and his own hard-to-forgive list teaches verse 32 differently — and the class can tell.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The Christian has *learned Christ* — not information about Him but the Lord Himself, through the preached Word — and therefore daily puts off the old self and puts on the new, in the concrete textures of truth-telling, governed anger, honest work, grace-giving speech, and a kindness that forgives as God in Christ forgave, all without grieving the indwelling Spirit who sealed him.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Eight of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 4:17–32 slowly, several times — once with a pen, marking every put-off and its matching put-on. The passage is built in exchanges, and your teaching should move exchange by exchange.
- ♦ Read the Small Catechism on Baptism, Part Four — *the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die... and a new man should daily emerge and arise*. This is the session's confessional engine; have it nearly memorized.
- ♦ Read Psalm 4:4, the source of *be angry and do not sin*, and Colossians 3:1–17, the sibling letter's parallel wardrobe passage. (Students who continue to this series' third volume will spend a full session there.)
- ♦ Review the Large Catechism on the Eighth Commandment. Luther's treatment of the tongue stands behind both verse 25 and verse 29, and it will arm you for the speech sections.
- ♦ Pray through your own week against this passage first — the anger kept past sundown, the words that did not build, the name on your hard-to-forgive list. Teach absolved.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard, ruled into two columns: *PUT OFF* and *PUT ON*. Fill the columns as you teach — falsehood/truth, stolen goods/honest work and sharing, rotten talk/grace-giving words, bitterness and its kin/kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness. The completed table is the passage at a glance.
- ♦ The Small Catechism, open to Baptism, Part Four — physically open, where the class can see you read from it. The gesture teaches: this session's ethics live at the font.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The Christian has learned Christ — through means.** Not learned *about* Him merely; learned *Him*. And the means are named: *you heard about Him and were taught in Him* — the Gospel preached, the teaching given within His Church, drawing on the apostolic deposit. The knowledge of Christ is not a private mystical attainment; it is mediated knowledge, through Word and ministry. And its content has an address: *the truth is in Jesus* — located in the historical, crucified, risen Christ, not in any philosophy, system, or guru.
- ♦ **The exchange is daily, and it is baptismal.** *Put off the old self... put on the new self* — Luther's beloved "old man" and the new man of Baptism. The Lutheran tradition refuses to read this as a one-time act: the old Adam is an excellent swimmer, and he is drowned daily by contrition and repentance while the new man daily rises. Sanctification is not self-renovation; it is daily return to Baptism. And the new self is no upgrade of the old — it is *created after the likeness of God*, Genesis language, the lost image being restored in true righteousness and holiness.
- ♦ **The Spirit can be grieved.** *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* The Spirit is not a force or an influence; He is a Person of the Trinity, and persons can be pained. The believer's sin does not merely break a rule — it sorrows the divine Guest who dwells within. Yet note how even the warning carries Gospel: the grieved Spirit remains the sealing Spirit, and the seal holds *for the day of redemption*.
- ♦ **Forgiveness flows downstream.** *Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* The Christian forgives not because the offender deserves it (often he does not) nor because forgiveness is socially useful (often it does not seem so), but because of what he himself has received. The flow runs cross → believer → neighbor, and where a believer cannot forgive, the student book says it plainly: something has gone wrong in his apprehension of the forgiveness he himself was given. This is the Fifth Petition in apostolic form.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of the <i>therefore</i>

0:05–0:12	The Gentile mind: the diagnosis renewed (vv. 17–19)
0:12–0:20	You learned Christ — through the Word (vv. 20–21)
0:20–0:29	Put off, be renewed, put on: the daily exchange (vv. 22–24) — the heart
0:29–0:36	Truth-telling and the management of anger (vv. 25–27)
0:36–0:42	Honest work, generous hands (v. 28)
0:42–0:49	Words that build up; grieve not the Spirit (vv. 29–30)
0:49–0:54	Six vices out, three virtues in; forgiveness (vv. 31–32)
0:54–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 9 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, verses 22–24 with the Small Catechism open — the daily baptismal exchange is the frame that keeps every following specific from becoming law detached from Gospel. Second, verse 32 — *as God in Christ forgave you* — because somewhere in your room is a person carrying an unforgiven name, and this verse was written for them.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The Gentile Mind

Open by reading the whole passage aloud, then return to the opening charge: *you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do*. Paul's description of the mind outside Christ is severe — *futility of mind, darkened understanding, alienated from the life of God, ignorance, hardness of heart*, ending in callousness and greedy impurity. Your class met this diagnosis in Session Four; here it returns as the life the Ephesians have left.

Make the student book's sober point: apart from grace, the natural mind is not a neutral seeker slowly finding its way. Given time and freedom, its trajectory bends toward callousness. Our culture describes the unbelieving condition far more gently — basically good people on personal journeys — and Question 1 will let the class weigh what Paul's

harder reading gains and what the gentler reading loses. Do not gloat over the diagnosis; every person in the room walked there once, and the old Adam still knows the route.

You Learned Christ

Verses 20–21 give the great contrast, and the Greek phrase deserves the spotlight: *you learned Christ*. Not learned *about* Him — though that is included — but learned *Him Himself*. The believer has been brought into real, personal knowledge of a living Lord, not merely into a stocked mental file labeled “Christianity.”

Then trace the means, because the means are the Lutheran heart of the paragraph: *you heard about Him* — the Gospel was preached; the Word came through an apostle, then through faithful pastors and teachers — *and were taught in Him* — within His Church, by those given the teaching office, from the apostolic deposit. The knowledge of Christ is mediated knowledge: through Word and ministry, through the gathered Church, through catechesis. Not a private mystical experience; a churchly gift. And its content is located: *as the truth is in Jesus*. Truth has an address — the historical man of Nazareth who lived, died, and rose. Whatever the Christian truly knows about God, himself, or the world has come through Him. The Christian who wants truth goes to Christ — through the Scriptures, the preached Word, the Sacraments — and finds it there.

Put Off, Be Renewed, Put On

The heart of the session. The image is a change of clothes: *put off your old self... be renewed in the spirit of your minds... put on the new self*. Two garments — and Luther loved the literal Greek, *the old man*. The old man is the self your class met in Session Four: dead in trespasses, walking the course of this world, by nature a child of wrath. That garment is to be laid aside like soiled clothing.

Now the Lutheran care, and take your time. The putting off is not a one-time act accomplished at conversion and filed away. It is daily. Open the Small Catechism and read Part Four on Baptism aloud: the old Adam in us should, *by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever*. This is Ephesians 4:22–24 in catechism form. Baptism is the foundation; the daily living is the working out. The Christian does not graduate from the exchange; he returns to it every morning.

And do not undersell the new garment. The new self is *created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness* — Genesis 1 language. Not the old self improved; a new creation, the lost image of God under restoration. When your students put on the new self tomorrow morning, they are wearing the future of humanity.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student confesses — in class or at the door — that they keep failing at the same sin and wonder whether their faith is real, do not hand them a technique. Hand them their Baptism. The presence of the struggle is not evidence the new self is missing; it is evidence the old Adam is still being drowned — and he is, as the saying goes, an excellent swimmer. The Christian life is not the absence of the fight but the daily return to the font where the fight is won: contrition, repentance, absolution, rising. “Try harder” produces despair or pride. “You are baptized — drown him again today” produces saints.

Truth-Telling and the Management of Anger

Now the exchanges begin, and the first is speech: *put away falsehood and speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another*. The motive clause is the gem — lying inside the body of Christ is the eye deceiving the hand. The Eighth Commandment stands behind this, and Luther’s explanation behind that: not only no lies, but the truth spoken for the neighbor’s good.

Then the most psychologically astute pair of verses in the passage: *be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil*. Note what Paul does not say: he does not forbid anger. Quoting Psalm 4, he commands its careful management — there are things worth being angry about, and a Christian incapable of anger at evil has confused niceness with holiness. But anger is fuel, and fuel kept overnight invites an arsonist: *give no opportunity to the devil*. The sundown rule is not a metaphor your students should admire; it is a household practice they should adopt. Question 4 will surface how it actually goes.

Honest Work, Generous Hands

Verse 28 is one of the most quietly remarkable sentences in Paul: *let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need*. First, feel the pastoral reality — the congregation at Ephesus included former thieves, sitting in the assembly, addressed without embarrassment. The Church has never been a museum of the respectable.

Then walk the three steps, because the third is the surprise. Stop stealing — the law. Work honestly — the vocation. But the purpose clause goes further than fairness: work *so that he may have something to share with anyone in need*. The redeemed hand moves from taking to earning to *giving*. This verse is foundational for the Lutheran doctrine of vocation your class met in Session Four: daily labor is not merely self-support; it is the engine of generosity, the means by which God supplies the neighbor through your students’ paychecks. Question 5 makes it personal.

Words That Build Up; Grieve Not the Spirit

Verse 29 sets the speech standard: *let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths* — the Greek is *sapros logos*, literally a *rotten word*, speech that putrefies relationships and cannot be unspoken. And then the positive triple criterion: words *good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear*. Not merely the absence of bad words — the active production of grace-bearing ones. Concede to your class what every pastor and catechumen knows: the tongue is the slowest organ of the new self to be sanctified. The standard stands anyway, and the Spirit is patiently producing, along with the new self, a new tongue.

Then verse 30, and slow down: *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*. The Spirit can be *grieved* — pained, sorrowed. He is not an impersonal force; He is a Person of the Trinity, dwelling in the believer since Session Two's sealing, and the believer's rotten words and harbored bitterness genuinely sorrow Him. Let the class feel the intimacy of that — sin in the Christian life is not rule-breaking at a distance but grief given to the Guest within. And then point to the Gospel hiding inside the warning: even in the sentence about grieving Him, He is named as the One *by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*. The grieved Spirit does not unseal. The relationship that can be pained is a relationship that holds.

Six Vices Out, Three Virtues In; Forgiveness

The chapter closes with a clean sweep and a refill. Out: *bitterness* (the soured spirit that archives old wrongs), *wrath* (the eruption), *anger* (the simmer), *clamor* (the shouting that gives anger its public voice), *slander* (the speech that demolishes reputations), *malice* (the underlying ill-will). Read the list; resist defining each at length — the class recognizes them all.

In: *kind* (*chrēstos* — gracious, generous, pleasant), *tenderhearted* (*eusplagchnos* — soft-insided, where the Gentile mind had gone callous), *forgiving one another* — and the verb is *charizomenoi*, built on *charis*, grace: free-handed, grace-shaped forgiving.

And then the ground, the most important short phrase in New Testament ethics: *as God in Christ forgave you*. Teach the flow: from the cross, to the believer, to the neighbor. The Christian forgives not because the offender earned it or because it is therapeutic, but because he stands downstream of an ocean. And say the hard diagnostic gently, the way the student book says it: where a believer finds he *cannot* forgive, the problem is usually upstream — something has gone wrong in his apprehension of the forgiveness he himself was given. This is Luther's reading of the Fifth Petition: forgiven people forgive, not to earn the pardon but because the pardon is in them, flowing through. Question 6 will take this to the names your students are carrying.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Keep every specific attached to the exchange. The two-column whiteboard is not a behavior checklist; it is a description of the baptized life — what the new self looks like wearing its own clothes. Each time you move to a new put-off/put-on pair, touch the frame again: *because you have learned Christ, because the old man drowned this morning, because the new man rose*. Taught this way, the passage convicts without crushing and instructs without moralizing. Taught as a list, it is just law — and your students already know how that story ends.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. The specifics of this passage will already have done personal work during the teaching; the discussion should let that work surface gently.

Question 1 — Paul's diagnosis versus the culture's

The worldview question. Our culture narrates unbelief as a neutral journey; Paul narrates it as darkness and hardening. The double-edged follow-up — what is gained, what is lost — keeps the conversation honest: Paul's reading explains evil and magnifies grace, but it must never become contempt for unbelievers, who are what we were.

Question 2 — Learning Christ versus learning about Him

The formation question. The second half is the treasure: students naming the practices — sermons, the Supper, the catechism, family devotions, suffering endured with the Word — through which they learned *Him*. The answers will be a testimony to the means of grace without anyone using the term.

Question 3 — The daily exchange

The baptismal question, and the session's center. Many lifelong Lutherans have recited “daily contrition and repentance” since confirmation without ever describing what it looks like on a Tuesday. Press gently for concrete patterns — morning prayer, the Invocation, confession before sleep — and let the class teach itself the shape of baptismal piety.

Question 4 — Anger, handled and harbored

The most universally applicable question. Everyone has a sundown story. Keep it practical: what has actually helped — the timed pause, the prayer before the reply, the apology that

came at 9 p.m. instead of never. Watch for the student for whom anger is a live wound at home; follow up privately if needed.

Question 5 — Work and what it is for

The vocation question. The reframe is the payoff: daily labor as the supply line of generosity. Ask the second half plainly — what we do with what we earn — and let the silence work; verse 28 audits cheerfully but thoroughly.

Question 6 — The name that is hard to forgive

The deepest question of the set, and the one to choose if your class has the trust for it. Do not demand disclosure of the name — the question works even held privately. Anchor every contribution back to the ground: *as God in Christ forgave you*. And be ready for the student who needs to hear that forgiving is not the same as pretending the harm did not happen; the cross itself is proof that forgiveness takes the harm seriously.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Eight, consider Question 3 — the daily exchange. It cements the baptismal frame that keeps this whole passage Gospel, it turns the Small Catechism from memory work into a livable pattern, and it equips students for every remaining specific in the letter. Question 6 is the weightier alternative for a trusting class; an honest hour on forgiveness, grounded in verse 32, can be the most pastorally significant conversation of the entire study.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ *You learned Christ* — through the Word, in the Church (vv. 20–21), in two minutes. The mediated knowledge frame.
- ♦ Verses 22–24 with the Small Catechism read aloud: the daily drowning and rising. The session's heart. Never cut this.
- ♦ The sundown rule on anger (vv. 26–27) — one minute, fully practical.
- ♦ Verse 32 and the downstream flow of forgiveness, with its ground: *as God in Christ forgave you*.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 3.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 9 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Gentile-mind diagnosis. Two sentences: the mind outside Christ darkens over time; you walked there once.
- ♦ The Eighth Commandment development under verse 25. Name the commandment and move.
- ♦ Verse 28's background on thieves in the congregation. Keep the three steps — stop, work, share.
- ♦ The *sapros logos* word study. Keep “rotten words” and the three criteria.
- ♦ The six-vice taxonomy. Read the list without defining each term; the class knows them.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the daily baptismal exchange: the old Adam drowned each day by contrition and repentance, the new man rising each day to live before God. Sanctification is not self-improvement; it is daily return to Baptism. A student who carries that home owns the key to every ethical instruction in the rest of this letter — and a lifetime answer to their own recurring failures.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Colossians 3:1–17.** The sibling wardrobe passage — put to death, put off, put on, with its own vice and virtue lists. The closest parallel in Paul, and the heart of this series' third volume.
- ♦ **Genesis 1:26–31.** The image and likeness of God — the creation language echoed in verse 24. The new self is the old image under restoration.
- ♦ **Psalms 4.** *Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.* The source of verse 26, with the original sundown counsel attached.
- ♦ **Matthew 18:21–35.** The unforgiving servant. Jesus' own parable of forgiveness flowing downstream — and the catastrophe when it dams.
- ♦ **James 3:1–12.** The tongue — the rudder, the fire, the restless evil. The fullest New Testament companion to verse 29, familiar ground for students who began this series' predecessor with the Epistle of James.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four.** *What does such baptizing with water signify?* The session's engine. Read it until you can say it without looking; your class should leave with it ringing.
- ♦ **Small Catechism, the Fifth Petition, with its explanation.** Forgive us as we forgive — Luther's careful teaching that our forgiving does not earn God's but flows from it. The companion text for verse 32 and Question 6.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Eighth Commandment.** Luther at full strength on the tongue — slander, the charitable construction, the public and private word. The deep background for verses 25 and 29.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Excellent on the baptismal grammar of the put off / put on exchange and on verse 30's sealing language.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Pastoral and direct on the vice and virtue lists — moral exhortation that never loses the Gospel ground.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Detailed on the syntax of verses 20–24 and the force of the participles — useful for the teacher who wants the exchange's grammar exact.

A Final Word

This is the week the study moves from the sanctuary into the kitchen, the workplace, and the inbox — and that is exactly where Ephesians has been heading since the first *in Christ*. Do not apologize for the specificity. Your students do not finally drift from the faith over doctrines; they drift through unmanaged anger, rotted words, and unforgiven names. Paul knew it, and he wrote accordingly.

But keep the order you guarded last week. Every specific in this passage is downstream of the font. The class that leaves convicted *and* absolved — aware of the old man's wardrobe and certain of the new man's morning resurrection — has heard the passage as Paul wrote it. The class that leaves with only a list has been robbed, however accurate the list.

Next week, the walk continues upward: *be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us*. Ephesians 5:1–21 carries the new self into love, light, and wisdom — including Paul's frank treatment of sexual purity and the strange joyful command to be *filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. Read it twice, and notice how the passage ends in singing. So, God willing, will the study.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may the new man rise in your classroom every morning.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION NINE

Walking in Love and Light

Ephesians 5:1–21

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Nine. The worthy walk continues, and this week it climbs through four registers: love (*be imitators of God, as beloved children*), purity (*not even named among you*), light (*at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*), and wisdom (*making the best use of the time*) — before arriving at one of the most joyful commands in the New Testament: *be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. A passage that begins at the altar of Christ's fragrant offering ends with the congregation singing. For a Lutheran class, this session is a homecoming twice over.

Two preparation notes. First, verses 3–7 require your steadiest hand of the study so far. Paul speaks frankly about sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness — and raises the bar to speech and entertainment: *not even named among you*. The twin temptations are to skip the section in embarrassment or to ride it into a culture-war monologue. The student book does neither, and neither should you: it locates the shared root (disordered desire — the appetite refusing God's limits) and the surprising replacement (*thanksgiving*), and it commands cultural discernment rather than social withdrawal. Teach it that way and the section will land as wisdom, not scolding.

Second, plan for the ending. The Spirit-filled life Paul describes is corporate and musical, and the Lutheran tradition has loved verse 19 with particular intensity — Luther's own hymns set the Reformation singing. Have hymnals in the room. If your class has any voice at all, consider actually ending the hour with a stanza. Few sessions can be *concluded* in their own content; this one can.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Beloved children imitate their Father — walking in love shaped by Christ's fragrant offering, refusing even to normalize the old impurities, walking as the light they now *are*, redeeming the time in evil days — and the engine of this whole walk is the Spirit, who fills His people through Word and Sacrament and overflows in singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Nine of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 5:1–21 slowly, several times, and mark the four registers — love (vv. 1–2), purity (vv. 3–7), light (vv. 8–14), wisdom (vv. 15–17) — with the Spirit-filled life (vv. 18–21) as the crown.
- ♦ Read Colossians 3:16–17, the sibling singing passage: *the word of Christ dwelling richly... psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. The two texts interpret each other.
- ♦ Review Augsburg Confession, Article VI — the new obedience: *faith bound to bring forth good fruits*. The fruit of light in verse 9 is this article in apostolic form.
- ♦ Review the Large Catechism on the Sixth Commandment. Luther's frank, unembarrassed treatment of chastity is the model for how to teach verses 3–7 — direct, pastoral, and free of both prudery and crudeness.
- ♦ Pick the hymn. If you intend to end the session singing — and you should at least consider it — choose the stanza now and check the hymnal numbers. *A Mighty Fortress* or *From Heaven Above* makes the Luther connection sing itself.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Hymnals — one per student if possible. They are this session's visual aid, primary source, and possibly its closing act.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list. Today's entries: beloved children in Him, light in the Lord, filled with His Spirit.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Imitation rests on adoption.** *Be imitators of God* sounds impossibly high until the next phrase: *as beloved children*. Children imitate the father they already have; they do not imitate their way into the family. The imperative stands on the *huiiothesia* of Session Two — and the pattern of the imitation is concrete: *walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering*. The aroma of the Old Testament sacrifices, fulfilled at the cross, now scents the believer's ordinary acts of love.
- ♦ **You are light.** Not “you were in darkness and now stand in light” — *you were darkness; now you are light in the Lord*. The change is at the level of being, by union with the Light of the world, and the verb is present indicative: a statement of fact, the Spirit's gift, not the Christian's project. The walking follows the being — *walk as children of light* — and its fruit is *all that is good and right and true*. The imperative serves the indicative, here in its sharpest form in the letter.
- ♦ **Purity includes the tongue and the screen.** Immorality, impurity, and covetousness share one root — disordered desire, the appetite refusing God's limits — and the standard is *not even named*: not normalized in conversation, jokes, or entertainment. This is not social withdrawal but cultural discernment; and Paul's prescribed replacement for crude speech is neither silence nor scolding but *thanksgiving* — the tongue retrained from grasping to gratitude.
- ♦ **The Spirit fills through means, and the filling sings.** *Be filled with the Spirit* is not a crisis experience to be chased; it is a sustained state, renewed daily where the Spirit works — Word, Sacrament, prayer, and the gathered worship Paul immediately describes. Its marks are not ecstasies but four participles: addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing to the Lord from the heart; giving thanks always; submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. The Lutheran Church became a singing church on the authority of this verse.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of the new self
0:05–0:12	Imitators of God, as beloved children; the fragrant offering (vv. 1–2)

0:12–0:21	Not even named among you: purity in deed and speech (vv. 3–7)
0:21–0:30	You are light: identity, fruit, and the waking hymn (vv. 8–14) — the heart
0:30–0:37	Walk as wise: redeeming the time (vv. 15–17)
0:37–0:45	Be filled with the Spirit (vv. 18–19a)
0:45–0:52	The singing, thanking, submitting church (vv. 19b–21)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer — or closing stanza — and Session 10 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, verses 8–10 — *you are light in the Lord* — because the present-indicative identity is the week's instance of the study's master principle, and it deserves to be felt, not just noted. Second, verses 18–19 — the Spirit's filling and its musical overflow — because this is where the session, and Lutheran piety itself, breaks into song.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Imitators of God, as Beloved Children

Open by reading the whole passage aloud, then sit with the audacity of the first sentence: *be imitators of God. Of God.* Let the class feel how impossible that sounds — and then give them the phrase that changes everything: *as beloved children.* Children imitate their father not to gain the family but because they are in it. The little boy walking in his father's boots is not applying for sonship. Adoption first (your class learned the word *huiiothesia* in Session Two); imitation second, as its natural fruit.

And the imitation has a definite shape: *walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* The aroma language reaches back to the altars of Leviticus — the pleasing aroma of sacrifice — and declares them fulfilled at the cross. Then offer the class Question 2's lovely thought in passing: the believer's daily, unglamorous acts of love participate in that fragrance. The casserole, the patience, the visit — they smell, to God, like Christ.

Not Even Named Among You

Now the frank section, and your steady hand. Paul names three patterns that have no place among saints: *sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness*. Teach the student book's insight about the grouping — the first two are sins of the body's appetite, the third of the heart's grasping, and they share one root: disordered desire, the human appetite refusing the limits God has set. This framing keeps the section theological rather than merely topical, and it implicates everyone in the room, which is where Paul aims it.

Then the standard: these things must *not even be named among you*. Not merely not done — not normalized: not casual conversation, not mild jokes, not entertainment consumed with amusement. Pause on the student book's careful distinction: Paul commands cultural *discernment*, not social *withdrawal*. The Christian lives in the world, but the patterns of speech and amusement normal in the world are not, for that reason, appropriate among the saints.

Verse 4 extends it to the tongue — *filthiness, foolish talk, crude joking* — and then gives the replacement, which is the verse's surprise: *instead let there be thanksgiving*. Not silence. Not scolding. Gratitude — the tongue retrained from grasping to receiving. Touch the warnings of verses 5–7 honestly (the covetous man is an idolater; let no one deceive you with empty words) without parking there; they guard the section, but the thanksgiving is its destination.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Verses 3–7 will be heard as either wisdom or culture-war depending entirely on how you frame them. Keep three guardrails. Root the sins in disordered desire — one diagnosis that includes the coveter alongside the adulterer, which keeps the respectable members in the text. Aim at discernment, not withdrawal — the question is never “how do we escape the culture?” but “what do we normalize among ourselves?” And land on thanksgiving — Paul's replacement therapy, not mere prohibition. A class that leaves grateful has heard this section rightly; a class that leaves merely indignant about the culture has not.

You Are Light

The heart of the session. Read verse 8 slowly and press the grammar: *at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*. Not “in darkness... in light” — darkness and light *at the level of being*. The Christian was darkness; the Christian, joined to the Light of the world, now *is* light. And the verb is present indicative — a statement of fact, not an aspiration. The Spirit produces the identity; the Christian does not project-manage it.

Then the imperative, in its proper place: *walk as children of light*. The walking is a walking into what the Christian already is. Your class has heard this order every week since the *therefore*; here it is at its most compressed — being, then walking; gift, then life. The fruit

follows: *all that is good and right and true* — the natural produce of light when light is what you are (and Augsburg VI's "faith bound to bring forth good fruits" in apostolic dress).

Two more notes before moving on. The examined life: *try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord* — not a rulebook for every situation but a Lord whose pleasure is the daily measure; discernment, not legalism. And the strange, wonderful verse 14, which most scholars hear as a fragment of an early Christian hymn — quite possibly baptismal: *Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you*. The Church was singing its theology within living memory of the apostles. Hold that thought; verse 19 is coming.

Walk as Wise: Redeeming the Time

Verses 15–17 turn to wisdom — *blepete*, look carefully how you walk. Wisdom in Scripture is not cleverness; it is the practical art of living rightly in the fear of the Lord. And its first discipline here is temporal: *making the best use of the time* — the Greek is *exagorazomenoi ton kairon*, literally *buying out the opportunity*, redeeming the time. Time as a resource to be invested, not a quantity to be consumed.

The student book is unsparing here, and you can be too, with a smile: the Christian who gives six hours a night to the television or the scroll has not redeemed the time; he has surrendered it. *Because the days are evil* — the cultural currents are not neutral, and the unwatchful are carried by them. But end the section on its promise rather than its warning: *understand what the will of the Lord is* — and the will of the Lord is *knowable*, revealed in Scripture, preached from faithful pulpits, taught in catechesis. The fool is not the one who lacks information; he is the one who walks without consulting what God has plainly said.

Be Filled with the Spirit

Now the crown. *Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*. The comparison is deliberate and illuminating: two fillings, two altered states. Both change how a person speaks, carries himself, relates to others — but in opposite directions. Wine produces *asōtia*, dissipation, the unraveling of self-control into every pattern Paul has just forbidden. The Spirit produces a controlled exuberance that overflows not in disorder but in worship.

Then make the Lutheran clarification, because someone in your room has been told otherwise: being filled with the Spirit is not a crisis experience to be sought at special moments, an upgrade beyond Baptism for the spiritually elite. It is a *sustained state* — the ongoing operation of the same Spirit who sealed your students at the font — renewed by daily means: the Word heard, the Sacraments received, prayer, and the gathered worship Paul is about to describe. The question "have you been filled with the Spirit?" has a Lutheran answer: I was sealed in Baptism, and He fills me still, every place His means are found.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When a student asks — perhaps wistfully, after years in traditions that chased the experience — “*How do I get filled with the Spirit?*”, hand them a hymnal and a service folder. Not as a deflection: as the answer. The Spirit fills through His appointed means, and verse 19 names congregational song as one of the places the filling shows itself and spreads — saints *addressing one another* in psalms and hymns, teaching each other the faith with melody attached. The Lutheran who has sung the liturgy, the catechism hymns, and *A Mighty Fortress* for forty years has been undergoing Ephesians 5:18–19 the entire time. Chasing the feeling is optional. The means are guaranteed.

The Singing, Thanking, Submitting Church

Four participles describe the Spirit-filled life, and they are strikingly concrete. *Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* — the Spirit-filled life is corporate and musical; the congregation’s singing is mutual edification, saints teaching saints with the truth set to melody. Here the Lutheran tradition rises to its feet: Luther wrote hymns because he read this verse — *A Mighty Fortress, From Heaven Above* — and the Reformation put the faith into the people’s mouths in song. Open the hymnals; show the class that the book in the pew rack is this verse’s standing fulfillment.

Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart — the song is vertical as well as horizontal, and the heart sings even when the voice wavers. *Giving thanks always and for everything* — the thanksgiving of verse 4 returns as a way of life. And *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ* — the fourth participle, which doubles as the doorway into next week’s household instructions. Name it now, plainly: before Paul says one word to wives, husbands, children, or servants, he addresses *everyone* with mutual submission out of reverence for Christ. Your class will need that frame next week; install it tonight.

Then, if you planned it: sing the stanza. End the teaching inside the text.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. After a passage this wide, the discussion should gather rather than scatter.

Question 1 — Imitating God: easy and hard

The opener with built-in honesty. The “as beloved children” frame keeps confession from sliding into despair: the hard places are where the Father is still raising His child, not where the adoption is in doubt.

Question 2 — Daily love as fragrance

The devotional question, and quietly transformative. Ordinary acts of love participating in the aroma of Christ's offering reframes the unseen labors — caregiving, patience, the thousandth packed lunch — that several of your students perform without anyone noticing. Some of them need this question more than they will say.

Question 3 — “Not even named” versus the culture

The discernment question, and the one requiring your firmest moderation. Hold the guardrails from the teaching: one root (disordered desire), discernment not withdrawal, thanksgiving as the replacement. Ask for practical positives — what households have actually done about speech and screens — rather than a catalog of cultural grievances.

Question 4 — Light at the level of being

The identity question and the session's doctrinal center. The second half is the testimony prompt: where has darkness been exposed simply by the presence of a different kind of life? Stories of quiet influence — the coworker who noticed, the neighbor who asked — are this doctrine walking.

Question 5 — Redeeming the time

The most practical question, and gently convicting for everyone including the teacher. Keep it constructive: the disciplines that have actually helped — the phone left in the kitchen, the fixed devotion hour, the Sabbath-shaped Sunday. The goal is stewardship, not guilt.

Question 6 — The hymns that shaped you

The warmest question of the study so far, and in a Lutheran class, nearly self-leading. Which hymns have students returned to; what has singing the truth done that reading alone did not. Expect deathbed stories, confirmation verses, and the discovery that half the class's theology arrived with a tune attached. If you end by singing, this question is the natural runway.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Nine, consider Question 6 — the hymns. It lands the session's joyful destination, it requires no defenses, and in a confessional Lutheran class it reliably produces the richest and most affectionate conversation of the study: the body testifying that Ephesians 5:19 has been forming it all along. Question 4 is the doctrinal alternative if you would rather cement the you-are-light identity — and in a quieter class it may travel further.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ *As beloved children* — adoption before imitation, in two minutes. The frame for everything.
- ♦ The purity section's three guardrails — one root, discernment not withdrawal, thanksgiving as replacement — even compressed to five minutes. Skipping it teaches the wrong lesson about Scripture's frankness. Never cut this entirely.
- ♦ *You are light in the Lord* — the present indicative, given full weight.
- ♦ *Be filled with the Spirit* through the means, with the hymnal held up as Exhibit A.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 6.
- ♦ Closing prayer (or stanza) and the Session 10 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The fragrant-offering background. One sentence: the aroma of the altars, fulfilled at the cross, now scenting your love.
- ♦ The Greek speech terms in verse 4. "Filth, empty chatter, crude jokes" needs no vocabulary list.
- ♦ The verse 14 hymn fragment. A footnote — unless you are ending in song, in which case it is your introduction.
- ♦ The time-redemption cultural critique. Keep the phrase *buying out the opportunity* and one example; drop the inventory.
- ♦ The four participles as separate developments. Name all four in one sentence and spend the minutes on the singing.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be verse 8 with its grammar intact: *you were darkness; you are light in the Lord* — being first, walking second, the gift before the life, one more time and at maximum compression. A student who has this verse has the master key to the whole second half of the letter, and a week's worth of identity to walk in.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Leviticus 1:9 and Genesis 8:21.** The *pleasing aroma* of sacrifice — the Old Testament fragrance language fulfilled in Ephesians 5:2.
- ♦ **John 8:12 and Matthew 5:14–16.** *I am the light of the world* — and *you are the light of the world*. The dominical foundation for verse 8: the believer's light is borrowed light, shining by union.
- ♦ **1 Thessalonians 5:4–11.** Children of light and children of the day — Paul's other extended treatment of the identity, with its own wake-sleeper imagery.
- ♦ **Psalms 90:12.** *Teach us to number our days* — the prayer behind redeeming the time.
- ♦ **Colossians 3:16–17.** The sibling singing passage: the word of Christ dwelling richly in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The two texts together are the New Testament's charter for congregational song — and another doorway into this series' third volume.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Augsburg Confession, Article VI.** The new obedience — faith bound to bring forth good fruits, yet without merit before God. The fruit of light (v. 9) in confessional form, keeping this whole chapter downstream of justification.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Sixth Commandment.** Luther's direct, unembarrassed, pastoral treatment of chastity and marriage — the model for teaching verses 3–7 without prudery or crudeness.
- ♦ **The hymnal itself.** *Lutheran Service Book* (or your congregation's hymnal), with particular attention to Luther's hymns. Not background reading — the primary source for verse 19, sitting in your pew racks. The tradition's five centuries of obedience to this passage, bound and indexed.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** At his very best on verses 18–21 — the liturgical and musical life of the congregation as the Spirit's filling. Essential preparation for the session's ending.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Fortright and pastoral on the purity section; a model of frank teaching without coarseness.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Detailed on the hymn fragment of verse 14 and the grammar of the participles in verses 19–21 — including why verse 21 belongs both to this paragraph and to the household code that follows.

A Final Word

This session begins at the altar and ends in the choir loft, and that arc is the Christian life in miniature: the fragrant offering of Christ received, the identity of light bestowed, the days redeemed, and the whole of it overflowing in song. Teach it with the joy it carries. After two weeks of vice lists and hard specifics, your class has earned an hour that ends in music — and so have you.

And prepare yourself now for what comes next, because next week is the session teachers worry about most. Ephesians 5:22–6:9 — the Christian household: wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters. The culture has strong feelings about this passage; so do some of your students; and Paul, read whole, confounds every caricature. The student book gives it a full, careful, unflinching treatment, and this guide will walk you through it step by step. Read the passage twice before Session Ten — and notice, before anything else, that it begins where this week ended: *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. You installed that frame tonight. Next week you will need it.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may your classroom end its hour the way the redeemed end all things — singing.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TEN

The Christian Household

Ephesians 5:22–6:9

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Ten — the session most teachers approach with a knot in the stomach, and the one your careful preparation will repay most. Ephesians 5:22–6:9 is the most culturally contested passage in the letter: wives and husbands, children and fathers, bondservants and masters. The surrounding culture has strong opinions about it; some of your students arrive carrying wounds connected to it; and a teacher who mishandles it — in either direction — can undo weeks of trust in an hour.

Here is the good news: Paul, read whole, confounds every caricature. The passage begins where last week ended — *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ* — and in each pair it addresses *both* parties, laying the heavier and harder demand on the one holding authority. The wife is addressed in three verses; the husband in nine, and his standard is a love that dies. The institution of slavery, which Paul does not dismantle in this text, he quietly undermines from within — and the student book is honest that the Church took centuries too long to finish that work. Your task is to teach the passage with its own proportions, its own definitions, and its own Christ-saturated logic. Do that, and the text defends itself.

Recall the third reading commitment from Session One: we will let the household instructions have their proper weight — neither relativized as first-century scaffolding nor weaponized into something Paul never wrote. This is the week that commitment was made for.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The Christian household is not a one-sided hierarchy but a Christological reordering of every relationship in it — wives entrusted to submit as the Church does, husbands commanded to a headship that dies like Christ, children honored with the first commandment with a promise, fathers restrained from provoking, and servants and masters alike placed under one impartial Master in heaven — with human marriage revealed as a living parable of Christ and His Church.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Ten of the student book carefully, at least twice — and this week, three times is better.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 5:21–6:9 slowly, several times, counting verses: notice that in each pair the party with authority receives more verses and the harder command. The proportions are your first teaching tool.
- ♦ Read Genesis 2:18–25 (quoted at 5:31), 1 Peter 3:1–7 (the sibling household passage — familiar ground for students who studied First Peter with this series' predecessor), and Colossians 3:18–4:1 (the sibling code in the sibling letter).
- ♦ Skim the letter to Philemon. Twenty-five verses showing what the Gospel actually does to a master and a slave — *no longer as a bondservant but as a beloved brother*. It is this passage's theology wearing work clothes, and the fourth volume of this series lives there.
- ♦ Review the Small Catechism's Table of Duties — husbands, wives, parents, children, workers — and the Large Catechism on the Fourth Commandment. The household code has been Lutheran daily bread for five centuries; teach from inside that tradition.
- ♦ Pray for the people in your class whose households are hard — the strained marriage, the estranged child, the worker under a harsh employer. This passage will find them. Ask the Lord to find them gently.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ♦ Your whiteboard, with the three pairs laid out in columns — *WIVES / HUSBANDS*, *CHILDREN / FATHERS*, *SERVANTS / MASTERS* — and room beneath each to record what is

actually commanded of each party. Filling the table from the text is the session's best inoculation against caricature.

- ♦ The Small Catechism, open to the Table of Duties — the visible sign that this passage is catechism territory, not culture-war territory.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **Both parties, and the heavier weight on the stronger.** The codes are not a one-sided imposition on the dependent party; they are a Christological reordering of the whole household. In each pair, the dependent party is addressed first — and then the authoritative party receives the longer, harder word: the husband must love unto death, the father must not provoke, the master must stop threatening under an impartial Master of his own. Whatever the surrounding culture's household codes did, this one disciplines power.
- ♦ **Headship is cruciform or it is counterfeit.** *The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church* — and Christ's headship leads, tends, sustains, and gives life. The standard for the husband is explicit: *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* — not the culture's standard, not the average husband's standard, but the Son of God dying for His bride. The Lutheran tradition received headship from the apostolic Church and fenced it with equal care: it confers no right to dominate, demean, or coerce. Where the love fails, the headship is already broken.
- ♦ **Marriage is a *mystērion*.** The two-becoming-one-flesh of Genesis has been pointing, from creation, to the union of Christ and the Church. Every Christian marriage is therefore a living parable — a sermon preached without words — and the *washing of water with the word* in verse 26 carries the baptismal note the Lutheran tradition has always heard: the Church cleansed in Baptism, the husband's love participating in his wife's flourishing in holiness.
- ♦ **One Master, no partiality.** Paul does not dismantle slavery in this passage — and the student book is honest that the Church would take centuries too long, with Christians implicated in the delay. But theologically he undermines it from within: the slave's true Master is Christ, the earthly master's claim is limited, the heavenly Master's claim is total — and that Master *shows no partiality*. The slave is the brother of the master; before God, the day-laborer stands equal to his employer. The seed of the institution's destruction is planted in its own household.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; the frame: <i>submitting to one another</i> (5:21)
0:05–0:13	The shape of the codes: both parties, Christ the standard
0:13–0:21	Wives and husbands: submission and headship defined (5:22–24)
0:21–0:31	<i>As Christ loved the church</i> : the love that dies; the washing (5:25–27) — the heart
0:31–0:38	One flesh; the profound mystery (5:28–33)
0:38–0:45	Children and fathers (6:1–4)
0:45–0:53	Bondservants and masters: the Master in heaven (6:5–9)
0:53–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 11 assignment

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, verses 25–27 — the husband's standard — because this is where every caricature of the passage goes to die, and where the men in your room receive the hardest assignment of the study. Second, the bondservant section, taught with full historical honesty — because how the Church handles this text in front of a watching generation is itself a witness, for good or ill.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The Frame: Submitting to One Another

Open by reading 5:21 — last week's final participle — before anything else: *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*. Grammatically and theologically, the household code hangs

from this clause. Before one word is addressed to wives, husbands, children, or servants, *everyone* is placed under the discipline of mutual self-giving for Christ's sake. Then read the whole passage aloud and show the architecture: three pairs; in each pair, the dependent party addressed first, then the authoritative party; both parties addressed, with the demands weighed. The codes are not a one-sided imposition on the weak. They are a Christological reordering of the entire household.

Then do the counting exercise on the whiteboard — it takes ninety seconds and changes the room. Wives: three verses. Husbands: nine, and the standard is crucifixion. The household codes of the surrounding Greco-Roman world addressed only the paterfamilias and told him how to manage his property; Paul addresses wives, children, and slaves as full moral agents in Christ, and then turns the longest guns on the men. Whatever this passage is, it is not the culture's chauvinism with a Bible verse attached.

Wives and Husbands: The Words Defined

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Two definitional moves keep this verse from being misheard. First, the verb is the same one from verse 21 — the wife's submission is one specific case of the self-ordering all Christians owe one another, now given a distinctive shape within marriage: rendered *as to the Lord*, dignified by its true addressee. Second, what submission is not: it is not inferiority of worth, not silence, not the surrender of judgment, and never the enabling of sin. The Church submits to Christ as the one who died for her — trust given to self-giving love is the whole picture.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. Define headship from its stated analogy, not from the culture's resentments or nostalgias. Christ's headship over the Church is authority *and* responsibility — He leads, but He also tends, sustains, nourishes; He is the Church's source of life. The husband's headship is analogous: not the senior partner's privileges but the particular calling to lead in love and give life to the household entrusted to him. The Lutheran tradition received this teaching from the apostolic Church and guarded it carefully: headship confers no right to dominate, demean, or coerce, and where the husband fails in sacrificial love, the headship itself is distorted.

When Abuse Is in the Room

Statistically, someone in your class has lived under a man who quoted this passage while breaking it. Say the guardrail out loud, once, plainly — not as a digression but as the text's own teaching: this passage condemns domination by its own standard, and a wife's submission is never a mandate to endure abuse. Headship that coerces has already forfeited the name; it is the counterfeit Paul's analogy excludes. A member facing such a situation should hear from you — publicly, before they ever have to ask privately — that the right response involves the pastor, protection, and the full care of Christ's church. One calm sentence to the whole room can be a lifeline to the one person it was for.

As Christ Loved the Church

Now the longer, harder call, and your first slow-down. *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* Name the standard precisely: not the surrounding culture's standard, not the standard of decent ordinary husbands — the Son of God at the cross. The student book says it without flinching: the husband's calling is, in a real sense, harder than the wife's. She is called to submission in love; he is called to a love that dies — preferences, comforts, time, interests, and if necessary life itself, laid down. Luther was emphatic in his marriage writings: the husband's role in the household is the role of Christ in the Church, and that role belongs to the one who gives himself up. Let the men in the room sit under that for a moment without rescue.

Then verses 26–27, and the baptismal note. Christ gave Himself up *that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word*, to present her *in splendor, without spot or wrinkle*. The Lutheran tradition has always heard Holy Baptism here — the Church washed by water and the Word, every Christian washed at the font.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When you reach *the washing of water with the word*, open the Small Catechism and let Luther ask his own question: *How can water do such great things?* — and give his answer: it is not the water, but the Word of God in and with the water, and faith which trusts that Word. Verse 26 is that answer in apostolic form. And then draw the household consequence: the husband whose love follows the Christ-pattern participates, in his small daily measure, in his wife's sanctification — not by lecturing her toward holiness, but by a self-giving that helps her flourish in the holiness already hers by grace. Headship's job description, it turns out, is written at the font.

One Flesh; The Profound Mystery

Verses 28–31 ground the love anatomically — *he who loves his wife loves himself*; no one ever hated his own flesh, but *nourishes and cherishes* it — and then reach back to Genesis: *the two shall become one flesh*. And verse 32 unveils the secret the quotation was keeping: *this mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church*.

Give this claim its full size. Human marriage is not a social convenience that Christianity decorated; it is, by God's design from creation, a living parable of the ultimate marriage — Christ and His people. Every Christian marriage, in its quiet daily fidelity, is a small icon of the love story at the center of redemption: the husband displaying, without always knowing it, the love of Christ; the wife displaying the answering trust of the Church. The marriage is a sermon preached without words. Luther wrote tenderly of his own marriage to Katharina von Bora in exactly these terms, and the Lutheran wedding rite has drawn from this chapter for centuries — some of your students will recognize their own vows in it.

Then the summary of verse 33, with its careful asymmetry: *let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband*. Two parties, two callings, neither given the other's; both demanding; both made possible by the same Spirit who filled them in last week's passage.

Children and Fathers

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right — and note that Paul addresses the children directly, as members of the congregation who will hear this letter read. Then he quotes the Fourth Commandment, *the first commandment with a promise*, and the Lutheran tradition steps forward: Luther read the Fourth as the foundation of all earthly order — honor flowing first to parents and outward through every God-given office. Honoring parents also changes shape across the stages of life: obedience in childhood becomes respect, care, and patience in adulthood, including the long honoring of aging parents that several of your students are living right now. Question 4 will let them say so.

Then the fathers, and the heavier word again: *do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. One negative command, one positive. The father who demands too much, corrects too harshly, or crushes what he should cultivate provokes the very anger he then punishes. The father who is patient, who corrects with love, who affirms what is good, and who personally sees to his children's formation in the faith — catechesis is named here as *the father's* duty before it is the church's — is doing verse 4. The Small Catechism's section headings, "as the head of the family should teach them," stand on this verse.

Bondservants and Masters

Now the section that requires your full honesty, in three movements.

First, the context, stated plainly: Paul writes in a world where slavery was endemic — perhaps a quarter to a third of the empire — and his congregations contained slaves and masters, sometimes in the same household. In this passage Paul does not attack the institution directly; he addresses the people actually in his churches and tells them how to live in Christ where they stand. And say what the student book says without blinking: the dismantling would take centuries, and Christians would be deeply implicated in the failure to do it sooner. A class that hears its teacher tell the truth about the Church's record will trust that teacher with every hard text thereafter.

Second, the theological undermining. Watch what Paul does to the institution from inside: the slave is addressed as a full moral agent; his work is *as you would Christ, from the heart*, not eye-service — which means his true Master is not the man who claims to own him. *Bondservants of Christ*: the earthly master's claim is limited; the Lord's claim is total. And the reward of verse 8 falls *whether he is a bondservant or is free* — the deepest things in the kingdom are status-blind. The slave is the brother of his master. Press the logic: an institution whose theological foundations have been removed is standing on momentum, and momentum runs out.

Third, the masters — and the shortest, sharpest address in the codes: *do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him*. The master must render to his slaves the same good will he expects; the whip-hand of the household is told to put the threats away; and over both stands one Master who does not check social status at the door. The Lord sees through every social arrangement to the person inside it. For your students, the living application is the workplace: every authority they hold — employer, supervisor, board chair — is held under an impartial Master, and every labor they render is rendered finally to Him. Vocation, one more time, all the way down.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Teach the passage with its own proportions. Count the verses out loud; show that in every pair the heavier demand lands on the party with power; let the husband's nine verses, the father's restraint, and the master's warning carry their full weight. The caricature — that this text licenses the strong — cannot survive contact with the actual text taught at actual length. You do not need to defend Paul from his critics. You need only to read him slowly, in order, all the way through. The proportions are the apologetic.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one — and this week, pick with particular awareness of who is in your room.

Question 1 — Both parties addressed

The frame question and this week's safest strong choice. Why does it matter that the instruction is mutual? Because it reveals the codes as Christ reordering the whole household rather than armoring one side of it. A class that answers this question well has the key to everything else in the passage.

Question 2 — The husband's standard, seen

The testimony question for marriage. Where have students seen Christlike, self-giving husbandly love actually displayed? Expect tributes to fathers and grandfathers, and some quiet grief where the standard was absent. Keep the focus on the standard's beauty rather than on auditing present company.

Question 3 — Marriage as parable

The devotional question, and the warmest. How does it change a marriage to know it is a small icon of Christ and the Church? Long-married couples in your class will have unexpected things to say; let them. This question also dignifies the widowed and single, whose lives witness to the same ultimate marriage by other means — say so if the conversation needs it.

Question 4 — The Fourth Commandment across life

The intergenerational question. Honoring parents at fifty looks different than at eight, and several students are in the thick of honoring aging parents at real cost. The Lutheran reading — the Fourth as the root of all ordered honor — gives the conversation its theological floor.

Question 5 — Fathers, the line between

The parenting question. Where is the line between provoking harshness and formless leniency? Invite the fathers and grandfathers to speak from experience, including their regrets; few discussions minister to younger parents more than older ones being honest.

Question 6 — No partiality: hierarchy undone

The most historically searching question. How does the one-Master frame undermine institutions that grade human worth — and where is that work still unfinished? Keep it on the principle and the long arc rather than partisan applications; the text's own claim — the slave is the brother of the master — is radical enough without amendments.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Ten, consider Question 1 — the significance of both parties being addressed. It locks in the frame that makes the whole passage teachable, it carries no personal risk for wounded members, and it equips your students to read every household text in Scripture rightly for the rest of their lives. Question 3 is the warm alternative for a settled class — an hour on marriage as parable sends couples home looking at each other differently.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ♦ The frame: 5:21, both parties addressed, the heavier weight on the stronger. Never cut this — without it, everything else is misheard.
- ♦ Headship defined from the analogy: leads, tends, sustains, gives life — never dominates.
- ♦ Verses 25–27: the husband's cruciform standard, with the baptismal washing.
- ♦ The bondservant section's two honest sentences: Paul does not dismantle the institution here, and the Church took too long; but the one impartial Master undermines it from within.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 1.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 11 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Greco-Roman household-code comparison. One sentence: the culture's codes addressed only the man; Paul addresses everyone.
- ♦ The one-flesh anatomy of verses 28–30. Fold into the mystery.
- ♦ The wedding-liturgy and Luther-Katharina notes. Lovely, optional.
- ♦ The Fourth Commandment's broader social reading. Name it; the Large Catechism can finish it.
- ♦ The eye-service development. Keep “your true Master is in heaven” and move.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the standard that measures every role in this passage: *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. The household code's center of gravity is the cross — authority defined as self-giving, submission dignified as the Church's own trust, and every party, strong and weak alike, standing under one Master without partiality. A student who carries that home cannot misuse this text, and cannot be fooled by those who do.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Genesis 2:18–25.** The one-flesh institution Paul quotes — marriage as God's design from creation, now unveiled as parable.
- ♦ **1 Peter 3:1–7.** The sibling household passage — wives, husbands, and the hidden person of the heart. Familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor, and a complementary angle on the same apostolic teaching.
- ♦ **Colossians 3:18–4:1.** The compressed sibling code, carried in the same satchel — and a preview of this series' third volume, where its phrase *in the Lord* receives a full session.
- ♦ **The Letter to Philemon.** Twenty-five verses of this passage's slave-and-master theology in living practice: *no longer as a bondservant but as a beloved brother*. The whole fourth volume of this series walks through it; reading it now shows your students where the seed planted in Ephesians 6 grows.
- ♦ **Revelation 19:6–9 and 21:2.** The marriage supper of the Lamb; the bride adorned for her husband. Where the profound mystery is heading.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Small Catechism, Table of Duties.** Husbands, wives, parents, children, workers — the household code arranged for daily use. Five centuries of Lutheran households have lived this passage through these paragraphs.
- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Fourth Commandment.** Luther's expansive treatment of honor — parents first, then every office of authority — with his characteristic insistence that the commandment binds those who hold authority as strictly as those under it.
- ♦ **Luther, *The Estate of Marriage and the marriage writings*.** Luther's warm, earthy, unsentimental theology of marriage as divine institution and school of faith — the

Reformer changing diapers to the glory of God. The pastoral background for the whole first half of this session.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Particularly strong on the baptismal washing of verse 26 and on the liturgical afterlife of this passage in the marriage rite.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** Direct, balanced exposition of the codes from within the old Lutheran household tradition.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Extensive historical material on first-century slavery and the Greco-Roman household codes — the comparative background that makes Paul's both-parties address stand out in relief.

A Final Word

You taught the hard one this week. Whatever else happened in the hour, your class watched a teacher take the most contested passage in the letter and read it slowly, honestly, whole — defining its terms from its own analogies, laying its heaviest weights where Paul laid them, telling the truth about the Church's failures, and refusing both the culture's dismissal and the abuser's distortion. That demonstration outlasts the session. Students who have seen a hard text handled faithfully once will bring every future hard text back to the Scriptures instead of away from them.

And do not lose the passage's beauty in its controversies. At its center stands a wedding: Christ and His bride, the washing, the splendor, the love that gave itself up — and every ordinary Christian household in your classroom enlisted as a small living parable of it. Send your students home with that picture. It is the one Paul painted.

Next week, the finale. *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God.* Ephesians 6:10–24 gathers every thread of the study — the heavenly places, the powers, the seated Christ, the Word, the praying church, the ambassador in chains — into the great closing summons. It is one of the most beloved passages in Scripture and one of the most misread; the student book restores it to its context, and your last session of the study deserves your best preparation. Read it twice, and notice whose armor it is.

May the Lord bless your teaching this week, and may every household represented in your classroom be reordered, gently and daily, by the love that gave itself up for the Church.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION ELEVEN

The Whole Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10–24

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Eleven — the last session of the study. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.* Paul closes the letter with a call to arms, and the student book closes the volume by restoring this beloved, much-misread passage to its home: not a free-floating pep talk for spiritual warriors, but the summation of everything the letter has said. The Christian who has been blessed with every spiritual blessing, raised from the dead, seated in the heavenly places, joined to one body, and ordered into a Christ-shaped household is the Christian who discovers that this whole life is lived in the middle of a conflict — and that God has not left him unequipped.

Your finale has one great secret to disclose, and you should plan the hour around it: *whose armor it is*. Paul says *the whole armor of God*, and he means it possessively — in Isaiah, it is God Himself who puts on righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet. The armor is God's own, lent to His people. And when the pieces are named, your class will discover something better still: they have studied every piece already. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word — the armor is the letter. Putting on the armor of God is putting on Ephesians. The whiteboard list you began in Session One completes itself this week, and the study ends where it began: gift before task, indicative before imperative, *in Christ* before all.

One housekeeping note from eleven weeks ago: if you recorded your students' Session One answers to “what are you hoping to receive?”, bring them. Reading them back is the most powerful ten minutes available to you this week.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The letter ends with a battle in which the Christian manufactures nothing: the strength is the Lord's, the armor is God's own — truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word, every piece a gift the letter has already delivered — put on and kept operative through prayer, by a church standing together behind an ambassador in chains, under a benediction of peace, love with faith, and grace.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Session Eleven of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ♦ Read Ephesians 6:10–24 slowly, several times — and then read the whole letter once more, in one sitting, as you did before Session One. You will teach the finale differently for having just walked the road it summarizes.
- ♦ Read Isaiah 59:15–21 — the Lord, seeing no man to intercede, puts on righteousness as a breastplate and the helmet of salvation on His head. The single most important background text of the session: the armor is God's before it is anyone's.
- ♦ Review the Large Catechism on the Sixth and Seventh Petitions — Luther on temptation, the evil one, and deliverance. The catechism's realism about the devil is this passage's realism.
- ♦ Retrieve your Session One notes — the recorded hopes and questions your students brought to the study. Plan five to ten minutes to read them back.
- ♦ Pray through the armor for your class, piece by piece — and then, in the spirit of verses 19–20, ask someone to pray for *you* as you teach this last hour. Even the apostle asked.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ♦ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ♦ Copies of the student book — and, if you have them, information about *To Live Is Christ*, the second volume of this series, for students who want to continue into Philippians.
- ♦ Your whiteboard with the *in Christ* list — complete after eleven weeks, and about to be put to its final use.
- ♦ The Session One record of student hopes, ready to read aloud.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The strength is the Lord's; the armor is God's own.** *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might* — not a summons to inner fortitude but to dependence. The Christian has no reserve of independent moral strength; he has a Lord who conquered at the cross and gives His conquering power through the means of grace. And the armor is *the armor of God* in the possessive sense Isaiah supplies: God Himself wears this armor, and He lends it to His people. Nothing in the panoply is manufactured by the wearer.
- ♦ **The real enemy is not flesh and blood.** Behind the visible conflicts — the difficult person, the hostile culture, the institutional pressure — stand *the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness*. The Christian who fights only flesh and blood is fighting the wrong enemy, and usually wounding fellow image-bearers in the process. The Lutheran posture is sobriety without obsession: the powers are real, they are active, and they are defeated — acknowledged, resisted, never feared as ultimate.
- ♦ **The breastplate is imputed righteousness.** The Lutheran reading of verse 14 is the Reformation in armor: the righteousness over the Christian's heart is not his moral achievement but Christ's righteousness, given in justification, received by faith. When the accuser whispers that the believer has failed, is unworthy, is no Christian at all, the breastplate answers — *I am clothed in Christ's righteousness; my standing does not rest on my record*. And the belt that anchors everything is *truth* — known, catechized, confessed; the poorly catechized Christian is the more easily defeated Christian.
- ♦ **Prayer activates; the ambassador depends on it.** The armor is put on and kept operative *praying at all times in the Spirit* — prayer is not a seventh piece but the power supply of the six. And the passage's most touching turn: the apostle who commanded the warfare asks for intercession himself — *that words may be given to me... for which I am an ambassador in chains*. The contradiction in terms is the letter's final self-portrait: the King's representative, in the empire's custody, whose chains do not silence the embassy but somehow amplify it.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; the study in one minute

0:05–0:13	<i>Finally, be strong in the Lord</i> ; whose armor it is (vv. 10–11)
0:13–0:21	Not against flesh and blood: the real enemy (vv. 12–13)
0:21–0:31	Belt, breastplate, shoes, shield (vv. 14–16)
0:31–0:37	The helmet and the sword (v. 17)
0:37–0:44	Praying at all times; the ambassador in chains (vv. 18–20)
0:44–0:49	Peace, love with faith, grace: the benediction (vv. 21–24)
0:49–0:58	Discussion — and the reading back of Session One's hopes
0:58–1:00	The study's closing prayer

Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time in two places. First, verses 10–11 with Isaiah 59 open — the discovery of whose armor this is reframes the entire passage from demand to gift, and it must land before the pieces are named. Second, verses 19–20 — the ambassador in chains — because the prison frame you built in Session One closes here, and the letter's last image of its author deserves the hour's most reverent minutes.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Finally: Be Strong in the Lord

Open by reading the whole passage aloud — and let *finally* do its work. Everything the letter has said comes to bear on this closing command: the blessed, raised, seated, united, indwelt, household-ordered Christian is a Christian living in the middle of a conflict. Paul does not end the letter on a comfortable note, because the life he has described is not lived on neutral ground.

But press the phrasing before anyone hears a demand: he does not say *be strong*. He says *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might*. The strength is not the Christian's own — the believer has no reserve of independent fortitude, and the one who tries to resist the powers on personal resources fails. He has instead a Lord who conquered the darkness at the cross and the empty tomb, and whose conquering power reaches His people where it has reached them all study long: through the means of grace. The Christian is strong because Christ is strong, and the Christian is joined to Christ — the letter's first theme, returning as its last.

Then the disclosure: *put on the whole armor of God* — and the genitive is possessive. Open Isaiah 59: the Lord, finding no man to intercede, *put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head*. The armor Paul lists is the armor God Himself wears in the prophets — His own battle dress, now lent to His people. Nothing in the list will be manufactured by the wearer. Everything will be issued from the divine armory. Let the class feel the relief of that before a single piece is named.

Not Against Flesh and Blood

Verse 12 names the enemy, and your class met its territory in Session One: a city thick with Artemis, magicians, and mystery religions — readers for whom the spiritual atmosphere was unembarrassingly real. *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*. The seed planted eleven weeks ago is harvested here.

Two pastoral notes carry this section. First, the reframe: the Christian's daily conflicts have human faces, but the deeper battle is never finally with the difficult coworker, the hostile relative, the opposing faction. The Christian who fights only flesh and blood is fighting the wrong enemy — and wounding people Christ died for while the actual enemy goes unengaged. Question 2 will let the class apply this to their own conflicts. Second, the posture: sobriety without obsession. The Lutheran tradition neither demythologizes the powers into psychology nor descends into the speculative demon-hunting of some traditions. The powers are real; they are active; and they are *defeated* — your class watched Christ seated far above them in Session Three. The evil day comes, the armor is for withstanding it, and the goal is stated with magnificent modesty: *having done all, to stand*. Not conquer — Christ has done that. Stand.

Belt, Breastplate, Shoes, Shield

Now the pieces — and as you name each one, write it beside the *in Christ* list, because each piece is a session your class has already lived.

The belt of truth. The Roman soldier's belt anchored everything — tunic, sword, movement. The Christian's anchor is the truth: revealed in Christ, taught in the apostolic Scriptures, held in the Church's confession. And the Lutheran tradition speaks bluntly here, so you may too: the Christian must be catechized. Luther's catechisms and the Augsburg Confession exist because the poorly catechized Christian is the more easily defeated Christian. Eleven weeks of this study have been belt-fastening.

The breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate covered heart and lungs — and the Lutheran reading of which righteousness is the Reformation itself: primarily Christ's righteousness, imputed in justification, received by faith. Session Four, hammered into steel.

A Classic Lutheran Move

When the accuser comes — and he comes for every Christian in the room, usually at two in the morning, whispering *you have failed, you are unworthy, you are no Christian at all* — the breastplate is the answer, and your students should leave knowing how to say it: *I am baptized. I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ. My standing before God rests on His record, not mine.* Luther fought his own dark hours with exactly this counsel, and it has not aged. Self-examination has its place, but the heart is guarded by an alien righteousness — which is precisely why the devil cannot pierce it. He has no answer to a righteousness that was never yours to lose.

The shoes of the gospel of peace. The soldier's boots gave footing; the Christian's footing is the readiness given by the Gospel — the man who knows himself reconciled to God is not easily shaken, and he advances bearing the very peace that steadies him. Session Five's *He Himself is our peace*, now worn.

The shield of faith. Against *the flaming darts of the evil one* — accusation, doubt, despair, temptation — the shield is faith: not faith in faith, but the beggar's hand of Session Four, now raised, clinging to what Christ has actually said and done, in His Word and at His Supper. The dart that strikes a promise is extinguished.

The Helmet and the Sword

The helmet of salvation — Isaiah's own helmet, worn by God before it crowned any believer. Salvation guarding the head: the settled, perfect-tense *you have been saved* of Session Four, protecting the mind from the despair that decapitates resistance.

And then the panoply's only weapon: *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* Give them the detail the student book gives: the word is *machaira* — not a ceremonial blade or a distance weapon, but the Roman short sword, made for close combat. The battles come close — into the conscience, the bedroom, the hospital room — and the weapon for close quarters is the Word: preached from the pulpit, read at the table, memorized in the catechism, sung in the psalms and hymns of Session Nine. Your students have watched the Lord Himself use it — *it is written*, three times in the wilderness — and eleven weeks of this study have been sword drill.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Reveal the armor as the letter. Stand at your whiteboard, point to the *in Christ* list eleven weeks in the making, and walk the pieces: truth — Sessions One and Seven; righteousness — Session Four; peace — Session Five; faith — Session Four; salvation — Sessions Two and Four; the Word — every week. Then say it plainly: putting on the whole armor of God is putting on Ephesians. Paul has not introduced new equipment in the last paragraph; he has told the Ephesians to wear what the letter gave them. Your class has spent eleven weeks being armed, and this is the session they find out. No summary you could write will land the study better than that single disclosure.

Praying at All Times; The Ambassador in Chains

Verse 18 names the power supply: *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication... with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints*. Prayer is not a seventh piece of armor; it is how the six are put on and kept operative. Note the four *alls* — all prayer, all times, all perseverance, all the saints — and commend Luther's little manual once more: *A Simple Way to Pray*, written for Peter Beskendorf his barber, the most practical help your students will find for the standard verse 18 sets. Question 4 will let the class be honest about the gap and generous with what has helped.

Then verses 19–20, and slow all the way down, because the study's prison frame closes here. The apostle who has just armed the whole congregation and named the cosmic enemy asks the Ephesians to *pray for him — that words may be given to me, in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel*. The great apostle, after every sermon and shipwreck, still asks for the right words. And then the letter's final self-portrait, one of the most arresting phrases Paul ever wrote: *for which I am an ambassador in chains*. An ambassador had standing, protection, immunity — an ambassador in chains is a contradiction in terms. Yet that is what he is: the representative of the King of kings, in Rome's custody, whose chains have not silenced the embassy but somehow amplified it — his chained preaching has rung through twenty centuries louder than the speeches of every free orator of his age. Remind the class where the study began: a letter from prison. The man who opened the letter in chains closes it still wearing them — and calls them his credentials.

Peace, Love with Faith, Grace

The letter ends as gently as it began. Tychicus — the courier your class met in Session One, carrying this letter and its siblings along the same roads — will tell the Ephesians everything. And then the benediction: *Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith... Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible*. Point out what Question 6 will explore: the Lutheran liturgy sends the congregation out under a benediction every week for

exactly the reason Paul ends this way — the last word over God's people is always blessing. Read verses 23–24 aloud, slowly, as the letter's last word over your class — because it is.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one — and whichever you choose, reserve the final minutes for reading back the hopes your students recorded in Session One. Eleven weeks ago they told you what they were seeking; tonight, let them hear it again and say what they found. No teacher-made summary can match it.

Question 1 — Strong in whose strength

The testimony question. Where has self-strength failed, and where has Christ's strength carried? Expect stories from hospital corridors and long caregiving years; this question tends to draw out the class's quiet veterans.

Question 2 — Not flesh and blood

The reframing question. How do daily conflicts change when the deeper battle is not with the visible opponent? Keep it concrete and personal — and watch the conversation soften toward the difficult people it names; that softening is the doctrine working.

Question 3 — The armor inventory

The self-examination question and the natural finale choice. Which piece feels most secure right now; which most loose or missing? The variety of answers becomes mutual ministry on the spot — the student secure in the breastplate steadying the one whose shield arm is tired. End it by pointing at the whiteboard: every loose piece is re-issued at the same armory, Word and Sacrament, this Sunday.

Question 4 — Praying at all times

The honest-gap question. Nobody's prayer life matches the four *alls*; the fruit is in the second half — the practices that have sustained prayer across long seasons. The class's answers will be a better manual than most books on prayer.

Question 5 — The apostle who asked for prayer

The humility question. What does it say about Paul that he asked — and about the dignity of ordinary saints' intercession that the apostle depended on it? A natural moment to ask the class, plainly, to pray for you and for your pastor by name in the weeks ahead.

Question 6 — Living under the benediction

The liturgical question and the warmest close. The Lutheran service ends in blessing because the letter does; how does leaving worship under that word shape the week? For some students, this question reframes a lifetime of Sunday endings.

A Practical Recommendation

If you pick only one question for Session Eleven, consider Question 3 — the armor inventory. It is personal without being invasive, it sends every student back through the whole panoply (and therefore the whole letter), and it converts the finale from review into self-examination with the Gospel close at hand. Question 6 is the gentle alternative — and if you choose it, end the entire study by speaking verses 23–24 over the class as their benediction. Either way, read back the Session One hopes. That is the night's true closing argument.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Keep

- ◆ Whose armor it is — *in the Lord*, Isaiah 59, the divine armory. The frame that makes the finale gift rather than demand. Never cut this.
- ◆ Not flesh and blood, in three minutes — the real enemy and the sober posture.
- ◆ The armor-as-the-letter disclosure at the whiteboard, even compressed: six pieces, six sessions, one study.
- ◆ The ambassador in chains — the prison frame closing.
- ◆ The benediction read aloud, the Session One hopes read back, and one discussion question, most likely Question 3.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The Roman military equipment details. One image per piece is plenty; the belt and the short sword earn theirs.
- ◆ The *machaira* word study. Keep “close combat”; drop the vocabulary.
- ◆ The four *alls* of verse 18. Name the verse's comprehensiveness in one sentence.
- ◆ The Tychicus material. One sentence — the courier from Session One completes his errand.
- ◆ The extended evil-day exposition. *Having done all, to stand* carries it.

The Single Non-Negotiable

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be whose armor it is: God's own — righteousness He wears, salvation He forged, truth He revealed, peace He made, the Word He speaks — lent whole to His people, so that the letter's last command is one more gift in disguise. The study ends exactly where it began: nothing manufactured, everything given, all of it *in Christ*. A student who walks out knowing that has the letter — and the armor — for life.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ **Isaiah 59:15–21.** The Lord puts on righteousness as a breastplate and the helmet of salvation. The divine armory itself — the indispensable background for verses 10–17.
- ♦ **1 Thessalonians 5:8.** Paul's earlier, smaller panoply — breastplate of faith and love, helmet of the hope of salvation. The armor image growing toward its Ephesian fullness.
- ♦ **Romans 13:11–14.** *Put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* The verse that makes explicit what Ephesians implies: the armor, finally, is Christ Himself worn.
- ♦ **2 Corinthians 10:3–5.** Weapons not of the flesh, with divine power to destroy strongholds. Paul's own commentary on what spiritual warfare is and is not.
- ♦ **Hebrews 4:12.** The Word of God, living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword — the sword of verse 17 described in flight. Familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ♦ **Large Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, Sixth and Seventh Petitions.** Luther on temptation and the evil one — the catechism's unembarrassed realism about the devil, and its unshaken confidence in the One who delivers.
- ♦ **Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*.** Commended in Session Six and indispensable here: the practical manual for verse 18's *praying at all times*, written for a barber and serviceable for every saint in your class.
- ♦ ***A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.** This passage, sung. The old evil foe, the little word that fells him, the Valiant One whom God Himself elected — Luther's hymn is Ephesians 6 in four stanzas, and it would be no error to end the study singing it.

Commentaries

- ♦ **Thomas Winger, *Ephesians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH).** Outstanding on the Isaiah background and the liturgical life of the armor passage — and a fitting last recommendation for the volume that has served you all study long.
- ♦ **George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (CPH).** His closing pages send the reader out the way the letter does — armed, sober, and consoled.
- ♦ **Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker).** Full technical detail on the Roman military imagery and the syntax of the participles in verses 18–20, for the teacher who wants the finale's grammar exact.

A Final Word

Eleven weeks ago you opened a letter from prison with a room full of students, wrote two words at the top of a whiteboard, and promised that the little phrase would unlock everything. Tonight the list under those two words is full, the armor has turned out to be the letter itself, and the man in chains has signed off with grace and peace. You have taught the grandest of the captivity letters from its address to its benediction. That is no small stewardship, and it was not carried in your own strength either. *Soli Deo Gloria* has been the closing of every session for a reason.

Before the room empties, do three things. Read back the Session One hopes, and let your students testify to what the Lord has done with eleven weeks of His Word. Commend the road ahead — the second volume of this series, *To Live Is Christ*, takes up Philippians, written from the same imprisonment by the same chained ambassador, and a class that has finished Ephesians together is a class worth keeping together. And end under the benediction: read Ephesians 6:23–24 over your students as the last words of the study, because Paul wrote them to be exactly that.

Thank you for teaching. The Church lives by the Word of God taught patiently in ordinary rooms by faithful people, and for eleven weeks you have been one of them. May the Lord who chose you before the foundation of the world, who made you alive together with Christ, who seated you in the heavenly places, and who armed you with His own armor, keep you standing — and may grace be with you, and with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Soli Deo Gloria