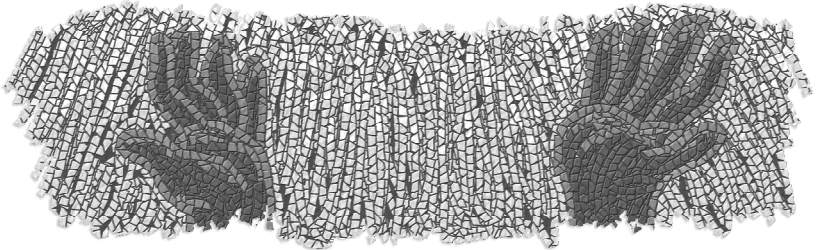


Praise *and* Prayer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 1:37; Eph. 1:15-23; Col. 4:5; James 2:20, 26; 3:13, 17.*

Memory Text: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (*Ephesians 1:22, NIV*).

Praise and prayer. Paul was a man who had many struggles, many trials, many griefs; but he was also a man of praise and prayer. Thus, after recounting in the earlier verses the wonderful things God has done for us in Christ, he then gives thanks to God for the faith of the church in Ephesus because, as he said, he has heard, not only of their faith but of their “love unto all the saints” (*Eph. 1:15*). He then tells about the prayer of intercession he makes in behalf of the Ephesians.

So often we tend to think of prayer only for those who are in bad shape, those who really need prayer; but here we have Paul praying for those who, apparently, are doing very well. The lesson for us, of course, is to take nothing for granted: Whether people we know are thriving in their faith or barely hanging on, prayer needs to be offered in their behalf.

Meanwhile, Paul's prayer of intercession gives us greater insight into what God has done for us in Christ and the great hope that's ours as a result.

The Week at a Glance: What was the spiritual state of the church at Ephesus? How is love related to faith for the Christian? How do we obtain knowledge of God? How does Paul describe God's power?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 22.*

Faith and Love

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (*Eph. 1:15, 16, NKJV*).

The Greek word for “therefore” can also be translated “for this reason” (*NIV*). For the reason of “every spiritual blessing” (*Eph. 1:3, NKJV*), with which God has blessed the church at Ephesus, Paul bursts forth in thanksgiving. These blessings, as we saw last week, include election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, unity in Christ, and the ultimate restoration of all creation to its original purpose (*vss. 3-14*).

Christian thanksgiving goes beyond merely being thankful. Thanksgiving must lead to a life that reflects and shares God’s blessings in active, meaningful, and day-to-day living. With the Ephesians, that seemed to be the case. They were Christians who lived their profession. Indeed, while jailed, Paul heard about their “faith in the Lord Jesus” and “love for all the saints” (*vss. 15, 16, NKJV*). To them Christianity was more than a system of beliefs; it was a call to transformed living and dynamic relationship. If faith leads to belief, belief must lead to action. For faith works through love (*Gal. 5:6*), and “faith without works is dead” (*James 2:20, 26*).

How would you tie in this idea of “love for all saints” with the notion that “faith without works is dead”? **How** are faith and love related?

The faith of the Ephesians was a living faith. They believed in the risen Christ and confessed that through Him God has acted for the forgiveness and salvation of humankind. But faith is more than belief, more than mere intellectual assent. Faith is also the spiritual quality of being faithful, and the Ephesian church was faithful and loyal to Christ and His claims. Their faith in Jesus had its natural outcome: “love for all the saints” (*vs. 15*)—both Jews and Gentiles.

Love, faith, and hope are the basic graces that mark the Christian life (*1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:4, 5*). However orthodox our doctrines, however laudable our worship and witness, and however faithful our stewardship, we cannot be Christians until we are marked by a double love—love to God, love to people. Is this not the commandment Jesus gave (*Matt. 22:37-39*)? Is it possible to love God and not to love His people? (*See 1 John 4:20, 21*.)

How, as a Christian, can you express your love for others? What outward, tangible, visible effort can you make in the next few days to show someone that your faith in Christ is real?

Wisdom and the Knowledge of God

(Eph. 1:17)

Having noted the first part of Paul’s prayer—thanksgiving for the life of faith and love—we now turn to the intercessory aspect of the apostle’s petition (*Eph. 1:17-23*). We are often tempted to make our petitions naive, concentrating on material- and self-oriented needs. The nobler aspect of petition is intercession, pleading in someone else’s behalf. Paul prays that God may give the Ephesians “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (*vs. 17, NKJV*).

According to these texts (**Ps. 111:10; Prov. 2:2; 4:5; 9:10; 11:12; Col. 4:5; James 3:13, 17**), **is biblical wisdom only head knowledge? Justify your answer.**

Philosophy may say “Know thyself.” Psychology may assert that in understanding self and its potential, one can find life’s meaning. But there is no knowledge greater than the knowledge of God, and the greatest knowledge that we can have about God is knowledge that He Himself reveals to us.

How has God revealed Himself to us?

Ps. 19:1

John 5:39

John 14:9, 10

Rom. 1:19-21

Heb. 1:1-3

God’s revelation makes possible “the knowledge of him” (*Eph. 1:17*), but “we cannot rightly understand or appreciate divine revelation without the aid of that Spirit by whom the word was given.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 241. Hence, Paul prays for the enlightenment of “the eyes of your heart” (*vs. 18, NIV*). Believers need more than rational knowledge. They need spiritual insight so that, with the inner eyes of the heart, they may know better four great truths: “the hope of his calling,” “the glory of his inheritance” (*vs. 18*), “the working of his mighty power” (*vs. 19*), and Christ’s headship over the church (*vss. 22, 23*).

The Hope and Inheritance (*Eph. 1:18*)

Read Ephesians 1:18. In your own words, write out what you believe the Lord is telling us with this single text.

In addition to wisdom and knowledge, Paul prays that the Ephesian church would comprehend fully “the hope of his calling” and “the riches of the glory of his inheritance” (*vs. 18*). In Paul’s writings, *calling* underscores both Christian privilege and responsibility. God has called us to belong to Christ, to be His saints (*Rom. 1:6, 7*), and to have “fellowship with his Son” (*1 Cor. 1:9, NIV*). Because of God’s call, those of us who were not His people have become His people (*Rom. 9:24*). To those who are called, Christ becomes “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (*1 Cor. 1:24, NKJV*). Believers are called to eternal life (*1 Tim. 6:12*). The call makes them free and enables them to “serve one another in love” (*Gal. 5:13, NIV*). The call ensures a harmonious fellowship, cutting across race and class, as we are “called in one body” (*Col. 3:15, NKJV*) and we are charged to lead a life “worthy of the calling” (*Eph. 4:1, NKJV*). This calling expects us “not . . . to be impure, but to live a holy life” (*1 Thess. 4:7, NIV*) and a peaceful life (*Col. 3:15*)—“worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (*1 Thess. 2:12, NKJV*). This call to the kingdom is “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 3:14, NKJV*), which should motivate us to press forward in the Christian race.

Such is the magnitude of God’s call. It covers the past (forgiveness), embraces the present (life of fellowship and peace), and awaits the future for that “blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (*Titus 2:13, NKJV*). This is the “hope to which he has called you” (*Eph. 1:18, NIV*), says Paul, and he prays that we may be enlightened to see its enormity and loftiness.

To hope, Paul adds “the riches of his glorious inheritance” (*vs. 18, NIV*). Inheritance can be understood in two ways. First, believers are God’s heritage: “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (*Rom. 8:17, NKJV*). Second, inheritance is what saints receive from God as His heirs. The latter suggests that inheritance is both a present privilege in that we have the joy of salvation now and a future reward that has been guaranteed and sealed by the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 1:13, 14*). This final reward “is . . . kept in heaven for you” (*1 Pet. 1:4, RSV*).

The Bible says we are to be “worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (*1 Thess. 2:12, NKJV*). As sinners, we can never be worthy enough to be saved; but because we are saved, we now want to live “worthy of God.” In this context, what changes do you need to make in order to exhibit this worthiness in your own life?

The Working of His Mighty Power *(Eph. 1:19-21)*

Paul's prayer has dwelt on the need for wisdom and knowledge and for the understanding of God's calling and inheritance. Now the apostle concentrates on the need to know "what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" (*Eph. 1:19, NKJV*).

One characteristic of God is omnipotence. That means God is all-powerful. How is His power manifested? Give some examples with supporting texts. See, for example, Gen. 2:7, Isa. 66:22, Luke 1:37, 2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Thess. 4:16.

Paul uses four Greek words in Ephesians 1:19 to emphasize the all-inclusive, incomparable nature of God's power. First, "the exceeding greatness of his power," the word for "power" is *dunamis*, denoting innate ability to accomplish what one has set out to do. The other three words are "according to the working [*energeia*] of his mighty [might = *ischys*] power [*kratos*]." Paul heaps word upon word, almost similar in meaning, to stress the immeasurable and absolute nature of what God's power has accomplished in the universe. *Energeia* suggests activity and effectiveness. God's power is at work. *Ischys* refers to intrinsic strength or might. *Kratos*, used in the New Testament in connection with only God or His Word, suggests the power that subdues or is victorious. Putting these four words together, we have a grand declaration: "The exceeding greatness of God's power is seen in what He has set out to accomplish. This He did with all His strength, winning a great victory by subduing and defeating His opponent."

The apostle immediately adds that this supreme demonstration of God's power is seen in what God has "accomplished in Christ" (*Eph. 1:20, RSV*). Paul defines this attainment in three ideas:

Resurrection: "He raised him from the dead" (*vs. 20*). To Paul, the supreme manifestation of God's love is the death of Christ (*Rom. 5:8*), and the supreme manifestation of God's power is Christ's resurrection (*Eph. 1:19, 20*).

Exaltation: "Seated Him at His right hand" (*vs. 20, NKJV*).

Universal dominion: "He put all things under His feet" (*vs. 22, NKJV*). Christ is the Lord of the universe.

The power that brought Christ from the dead is the same power that saves us from sin to salvation. Why, then, do we continue to fall as much as we do if we have such an incredible power working in us? Where must the fault lie? How do our own choices determine the extent of what God will do in us?

The Church, Christ's Body

How does Paul declare the majesty and glory of Christ's ultimate victory over Satan and His intimate relationship with the church? *Eph. 1:20-23.*

The fourth entreaty in Paul's prayer is a masterful mix of praise and petition. Praise because of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Petition that the believers may know that Christ's victory over death and His exaltation had two effects of cosmic significance. First, God has placed Christ above "all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet" (*Eph. 1:21, 22, NKJV*). Here is the signal to the universe that in the great cosmic battle between Christ and Satan, Christ has won the ultimate victory, and now all things are put under Him. He is the acknowledged Lord of all (*Phil. 2:9-11*).

Second, God has made Christ "head over all things to the church, which is His body" (*Eph. 1:22, 23, NKJV*).

Dwell on the implications of Ephesians 1:23, when it says that the church is Christ's body. What does that mean? What kind of responsibilities does that entail for those who are members of that body? *See also 1 Cor. 12:12-25.*

The body metaphor emphasizes the essential unity of the church with/in Christ. The very existence of the church as a community of believers is dependent upon the saving work of Christ. Its founding and its ultimate destination in the new earth are all grounded in Him. Apart from Christ, there is no church. The risen Lord is the Lord not only of the universe but also of the church. Hence Paul says, He is the Head of the church "which is his body" (*Eph. 1:23*). As the Head, the source and locus of authority and mission of the church is Christ.

Because of this closeness, this oneness of the church as the body of Christ, God has filled the church with "fullness of Him who fills all in all" (*vs. 23, NKJV*). Here is perfect assurance: Christ fills the church with every blessing and gift (*Eph. 4:11-16*) in order that the church may remain faithful to Him as His body.

What words of admonition and counsel would you give to someone (in light of today's lesson) who said, "I don't need to be part of any church or organized body in order to serve the Lord"?

Further Study: *Saving faith.* “It is not enough to believe *about* Christ; we must believe *in* Him. . . . Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. . . . A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

On God’s revelation. “The revelation of Himself that God has given in His word is for our study. This we may seek to understand. But beyond this we are not to penetrate. The highest intellect may tax itself until it is wearied out in conjectures regarding the nature of God; but the effort will be fruitless. This problem has not been given us to solve. No human mind can comprehend God. Let not finite man attempt to interpret Him. . . . Here silence is eloquence. The Omniscient One is above discussion.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 279.

Christ, the Head of the church. “Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church—He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church. . . .

“Loyalty to Christ demands the faithful performance of church duties. This is an important part of one’s training; and in a church imbued with the Master’s life, it will lead directly to effort for the world without.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 268, 269.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, review the essence of Paul’s prayer, as revealed in the texts for this week. For what, essentially, is he praying? Is this something you should be praying for, as well? Discuss.
- ❷ Paul prays for wisdom and knowledge in order that the believers may fully know God. For the Greeks, to know God means to know Him intellectually; in the Hebrew sense, it means to know Him experientially. Discuss the difference between the two.
- ❸ In light of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:20-23 about the victory Christ has won, discuss, as a class, the important question of why the battle with Satan and sin still continues. What insights in our understanding of the great controversy help us answer this question?

The Extra Day of School

by JULIA KOSINKOVA

Julia Kosinkova is an elementary school teacher in Bulgaria. At the end of the school year, the principal told the teachers that the schools had to make up two days of classes. However, instead of extending the school year two days, the authorities had decided to hold classes on two Saturdays.

Julia immediately applied to the principal to be absent on these two days. The first Saturday was designated as a sports day, so the principal gave her permission to have the day off. However, the second Saturday he could not excuse. It would be the last day of classes, and in Bulgaria, teachers give their students their final grades this day. Children usually bring the teacher gifts, and the day becomes more like a celebration. When Julia asked to be absent on this day, the principal said No. "If you insist on having the day off," he said, "I will be forced to fire you."

Julia did not want to lose her job, but she told the principal that she would not be present on Saturday, even if she lost her job. Then she went home and prayed about the situation.

A few days later the principal summoned Julia to his office. Once more he asked her to come to school on the last day. "It is such a big day for the children and the school," he said, "and you know that only the children's official teacher can give the students their record books." Still Julia refused, saying that Saturday was not a holiday or just a day off for her; it was her Sabbath.

The principal asked Julia to send her pastor to see him. When the pastor arrived, the principal asked if he could give Julia special permission to miss one day in church so that she would not be fired from her job. "I cannot do that," the pastor explained. "God commands His children to keep the Sabbath day holy, and no human—not a pastor, priest, or judge—can give permission to break God's law."

The principal thanked the pastor and asked him for a book to read that would help him understand Julia's faith.

A few days later the principal called Julia into his office. "I think I have found a solution for our problem," he said, smiling. "I will ask your students to come to class on Sunday instead of Saturday. Since the children were planning to go on a field trip this day anyway, they can combine the trip with the school closing ceremonies." Julia thanked the principal and made arrangements with the children. In her heart she knew that God had worked a miracle on her behalf.

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