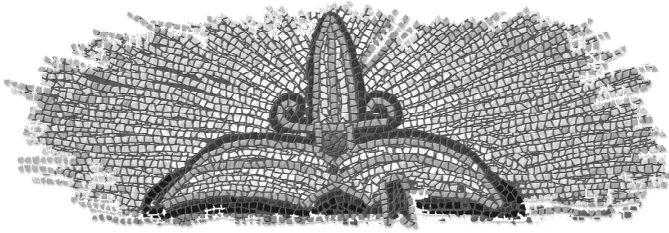


The Christian Communion *and* Conduct



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 119:9, 11; Mark 13:33; Eph. 6:17-24; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:8.*

Memory Text: “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (*Ephesians 6:18, RSV*).

Communion and conduct. Everything the apostle has spoken so far in the Epistle—from the origin of our life to the mystery of the Cross that established one united family; from the joy of salvation to the responsibility of Christian living; from the creation of a new humanity to the reality of spiritual warfare—all have their grounding in the Word of God. Without God's Word, inspired by and revealed through His Spirit, we would have no knowledge of His will and His purposes for us. It is through His Word He speaks directly to us.

And though God speaks to us, we must speak to God. Christian life demands both listening to what God says in His Word and speaking to Him through prayer. The Word and prayer provide power enough to withstand the evil one and to stay on God's chosen path. This week, among other things, we'll take a look at what Paul says to us about the role and power of God's Word.

The Week at a Glance: What is the role of the Bible in the Christian life? What role does it play in the battle with sin? Why must Christians be watchful? What role must prayer have in our battle against the devil?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 31.*

The Word and the Spirit

Take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (*Eph. 6:17, NKJV*).

Although Paul mentions the Word of God last in the six pieces that make up the Christian armor, it is not his intention to make it least in importance. The Word is foundational to Christian living. Without it we will not know who God is, who we are, how we came to be, what’s wrong with us, how we are saved from sin, what God has done through Christ, or what our ultimate destiny is. History bears witness that where the Bible is neglected, even for the briefest period, darkness of immense magnitude takes over. This is true in individual lives, as well as in the church as a corporate body. It is, therefore, not an accident that Paul places so crucial an importance on the Word of God in fighting life’s spiritual battles.

The Word of God is called “the sword of the Spirit.” What is the connection between the Spirit and the Bible? Summarize the answers given in the following verses:

John 14:26

1 Cor. 2:10

2 Pet. 1:21

God’s revelation is seen in varied ways (*Heb. 1:1-3*). The wonder of the heavens, the beauties of nature, and the marvel of life all bear witness to the Creator God (*Ps. 33:6-9*). But God’s revelation through His Son Jesus and through the Written Word are unique in that the former brought us salvation from sin, and the latter bears witness to Jesus’ saving act (*John 1:1-3, 14; 5:39; 17:17; Rom. 15:4*). The Bible thus makes us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (*2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV*).

Note what Paul says further on Scripture’s role in Christian life: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (*2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NKJV*).

What are the forces in your culture that have the effect (whether intended or not) of weakening trust in the Bible as the Word of God? After identifying these forces, ask “What can I do to protect myself and others against them?”

The Sword and the Battle

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus set an example for us in how we may rely upon God's Word in our warfare with Satan. His experience in the wilderness teaches us two important lessons. First, spiritual warfare is real, and none of God's children can escape from its reality or Satan's vehemence. Satan does not attack his own. The closer we are to God, the more Satan tries to get us on his side (*Job 1, 2*). Second, it is not enough to know the Word; we must know the Author of the Word and trust in His promises. Satan tried to use the Word to cast doubt on God's promises and purposes, but Jesus trusted the Word and followed God's way. "Jesus met Satan with the words of Scripture. 'It is written,' He said. In every temptation the weapon of His warfare was the word of God. Satan demanded of Christ a miracle as a sign of His divinity. But that which is greater than all miracles, a firm reliance upon a 'Thus saith the Lord,' was a sign that could not be controverted. So long as Christ held to this position, the tempter could gain no advantage."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120.

Note from the following verses how the Word of God equips us in overcoming the assaults of Satan. *Deut. 8:3; Ps. 119:9, 11; Matt. 4:4; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:4.*

The Holy Spirit through whom we have obtained the new-birth experience (*John 3:3-8*) is the seal and guarantee of that experience (*Eph. 1:13, 14*). He dwells in us (*Rom. 8:9, 11, 14; 2 Cor. 1:22*), transforms our mind (*Rom. 12:1, 2*), and leads us in the understanding of Scripture (*John 16:13, Eph. 1:17-23*). It is the same Spirit that inspired the Word of God, and its indwelling power enables us to take up that Word as a sword to fend off Satan's attacks. The Christian soldier must use that Word, "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (*Heb. 4:12, NKJV*), to penetrate and cut through, to discern right from wrong, and to distinguish between the voice of God and the whispers of the devil. That's what makes the Word a weapon of both defense and offense.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (*Ps. 119:11, NKJV*). That's the testimony of the psalmist. That's the experience of Jesus. What has been your own experience with the power of the Word in overcoming the assaults of Satan?

Prayer and Christian Warfare

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18, NKJV).

In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan describes a moving scene in which Christian encounters Apollyon in the great Valley of Humiliation. Apollyon, symbolic of satanic forces out to crush the saints on their march to God’s kingdom, attacks Christian with every weapon at his command. Armed with the sword of the Spirit, Christian puts up a valiant fight. In the midst of the deadly combat, Christian loses the sword. Apollyon rejoices that Christian’s doom is sealed, but Christian turns to another tested weapon called All-prayer, and the battle continues. Christian, using this weapon skillfully, defeats the enemy and raises a powerful shout of victory!

Read Ephesians 6:18. Though telling them to pray, Paul gives the Ephesians another admonition, one directly linked with prayer. What is it, and why is it so important? See also Mark 13:33, 1 Cor. 16:13, Col. 4:2, 1 Pet. 5:8.

Although Paul does not list prayer as part of the Christian armor, the apostle recognizes it as indispensable to Christian life and victory. “Praying always . . . being watchful to this end,” he says (*Eph. 6:18, NKJV*). Prayer is not only a fundamental essential to Christian daily living; it also carries an eschatological dimension. That is to say, prayer supplies not only strength for today but also hope for the coming end-time trials. A life girded with the armor of God—truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word—and linked with Him in prayer can be nothing but victorious over the evil one.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of prayer as a means of victory is in our Lord’s prayer life. Forty days of fasting and prayer, combined with His knowledge of and trust in God’s Word, prepared Him to defeat the devil in the wilderness temptation (*Matt. 4:1-11*). The Gethsemane prayer, pouring out His soul in agony to know and obey God’s will, prepared Him for the crucial battle on the cross (*Matt. 26:36-46*).

Make a list of some of the things prayer does for you. Make a list of things prayer does not do for you. Be prepared to discuss your lists in class.

Prayer and Christian Victory *(Eph. 6:18-20)*

In nonbiblical systems, prayer is the human's quest for God, a search after the unknown. In the Bible, prayer is our response to God's Word. He has spoken. He has promised. "Ask," He has said (*Matt. 7:7, Luke 11:9*). We respond to His bidding. Thus, to a Christian, prayer is not the first word; it is the second. The first word is always God's. Standing on the promise of God, we must pray. Listening to His Word and seeking Him in prayer make communication with God complete.

Prayer is often associated with the personal—our needs, our children, our families. The closer an individual is to our hearts, the more often we think of that person in our prayers. That is natural, and there's nothing wrong with that. But it's wrong when prayer is limited just to that inner circle and does not transcend to include the neighbor, the community, the church, and, above all, the hastening of God's kingdom. Praying for others is not being magnanimous but rather acknowledging that the family of God is more inclusive than human nature would let us believe.

Read Ephesians 6:18-20. On the lines below, write a few notes about prayer: about how to pray, what to pray for, when to pray—anything at all you can learn from these verses about prayer.

Notice, too, the personal note Paul has in the midst of his words to the Ephesians. He asks them to pray for him. But what does he ask? That he be released from jail? That he have more personal comforts, such as better food? No! Instead, in a selfless request, he asks that they pray for him to be a bold witness for Christ and that he might speak "boldly, as I ought to speak" (*vs. 20*). What a subtle yet powerful insight into the mind of someone who's dead to self.

To "pray without ceasing" (*1 Thess. 5:17*) requires that we order our lives according to God's priority, so at any time and any place we are in tune with God's will and purposes, and our life itself becomes a prayer, a testimony. How high is prayer among your priorities? What changes might you need to make in your life in order to give prayer the priority it should have?

Christian Character *(Eph. 6:21-23)*

Paul concludes the Epistle as he began: with a gracious greeting in the name of Jesus. While we are aware there is no other name given under heaven by which we may be saved except the name of Jesus, it is imperative to realize there is no other name by which we can define our relationship with God and with one another and establish a common community of faith. The redeemed community is an in-Christ community. That theme dominates the Epistle, and with that theme the apostle concludes this great hymn for unity.

The closing verses of the Epistle affirm three wonderful traits of Christian character:

A common fellowship. With tender words Paul introduces to the Ephesians the messenger who was carrying his message to them: “Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (*Eph. 6:21, NKJV*). Before the Damascus Road encounter with Jesus, Paul could not have said those words about Tychicus. But in Christ crucified, Paul saw the walls between the Jew and the Gentile collapse (*Eph. 2:14-18*). He accepted Tychicus, a Gentile convert, as a beloved brother and a faithful minister. In such inclusiveness we see the glory of a common fellowship.

A common concern. The community in Christ reaches across all kinds of frontiers to affirm a common concern. The apostolic church had a custom of exchanging greetings, sharing news, and assisting in the needs of another congregation. In keeping with this custom, Paul informs the Ephesians that Tychicus will give an oral report on the conditions in Rome. Such concerns contribute to global awareness among churches.

A common heritage. The Christian heritage is an imperishable heritage, and it comes “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” to all those who love the Lord “in sincerity” (*6:23, 24, NKJV*). The Revised Standard Version translates the phrase to say “with love undying.” Christian discipleship calls for a permanency in relationship between believers and the Lord. “ ‘Abide in me, and I in you,’ ” said Jesus (*John 15:4, NKJV*). Those who have that undying, ever-abiding love relationship with the Lord are those who receive the heritage of peace, love, faith, and grace. With those great words, each a gem from God’s heavenly throne room, Paul closes the Epistle.

What does Paul’s reason for sending Tychicus to Ephesus reveal about Paul’s character? What does it tell us about what Christian character should be in general? See also Matt. 4:23-25, Gal. 6:2, Phil. 2:4, 1 John 3:16.

Further Study: *The importance of prayer.* “Prayer is the breath of the soul, the channel of all blessings. As . . . the repentant soul offers its prayer, God sees its struggles, watches its conflicts, and marks its sincerity. He has His finger upon its pulse, and He takes note of every throb. Not a feeling thrills it, not an emotion agitates it, not a sorrow shades it, not a sin stains it, not a thought or purpose moves it, of which He is not cognizant. That soul was purchased at an infinite cost, and is loved with a devotion that is unalterable.”—Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 85.

Praying always. “Pray often to your heavenly Father. The oftener you engage in prayer, the closer your soul will be drawn into a sacred nearness to God. The Holy Spirit will make intercession for the sincere petitioner with groanings which cannot be uttered, and the heart will be softened and subdued by the love of God. The clouds and shadows which Satan casts about the soul will be dispelled by the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and the chambers of mind and heart will be illuminated by the light of Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 89.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back to the question about prayer at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. Compare lists. What have you learned from them? What misconceptions or false expectations, if any, might some people have about prayer? On the other hand, in what ways might we underestimate the efficacy and power of prayer?
- 2 If we are saved by grace, why is Christian character such an important aspect of our faith? Why does the Bible put such an emphasis on character?
- 3 If your class were to pen “an Epistle” to your local church warning them to be “watchful,” what things would you deem most important to watch for? If you were to pen an “Epistle” to the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, what would you write?

Discovering a “New” Church

by EDNA RODICH

When Edna Rodich started high school in western Kenya, she made friends with some Adventist students who invited her to their worship meetings. Impressed by what Adventists teach and how they study the Bible, she began to study the Bible with them. She was excited to discover the Sabbath truth and memorized several Bible texts to support it. Before long she was convinced that Adventists truly follow God’s teachings.

Edna visited her family one weekend and told her mother what she had learned. Mother surprised Edna by telling her, “You must not tell your father that you are attending Adventist meetings. I once attended the Adventist church too, but when I married your father, he forbade me to attend.” Whenever Edna returned home from school, she secretly attended Sabbath services, then attended church with her parents on Sunday.

Edna’s father eventually learned that Edna was attending the Adventist church; he told her she must stop going. Edna showed her father the Bible texts that support the Sabbath, but he threw the Bible away, saying “never talk to me about this again.”

In time Edna’s father softened and was willing to talk to her about what she believed. Mother rejoiced that her husband’s heart was softening toward the church of her childhood.

Edna invited her parents to attend Pathfinder Sabbath at church. Her father was impressed with how well behaved the Pathfinders were and how well they knew their Bible. After church that day her father praised her for her accomplishments and told her that she could become an Adventist if she wished. Then to her surprise, he offered to let her attend the Adventist high school.

Because of Edna’s faith and determination, her mother has returned to the church she loved. Edna’s brother has joined the Adventist Church, and her father shows signs of the Holy Spirit’s influence in his life.

“I am happy to be a part of this church that teaches the truth of the Bible, not traditions,” Edna says. “I want to be a literature evangelist and help other people find God, as I did.”



EDNA RODICH is studying at the Adventist secondary school in Baraton, western Kenya.

Nowhere is our relationship with others more important, more fraught with both temporal and eternal consequences, than in the family. Through family relationships God wants to show His love to the world. This quarter's study, *Families in the Family of God*, by Ron Flowers, has been written in the sad recognition that for many, this haven doesn't exist as it should. Our goal, if nothing else, is through study of the Word to help homes and families be what God would have them to be.

Lesson 1: A Family of Families

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Family Roots (*Gen. 2:18-25*)

MONDAY: Jesus' Affirmation of Families (*Matt. 19:4-6*)

TUESDAY: A Variety of Families (*Gen. 27:1-28:5, Ruth 1:22, 2:23*)

WEDNESDAY: One Is a Whole Number (*1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 2:11*)

THURSDAY: Household of Households (*John 20:17, Acts 9:17*)

Memory Text: *Ephesians 2:19, 20, NKJV.*

Sabbath Gem: Through our family, both in our households and in His church, God longs for us to experience His self-giving love.

Lesson 2: God's Word on Family Living

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Family Commandments (*Exod. 20:12*)

MONDAY: Family Narratives (*Ruth 1, 2*)

TUESDAY: Principles of Relationships (*Prov. 12:25*)

WEDNESDAY: The Royal Love Poem (*Song of Sol. 1:9, 14, 16; 2:3*)

THURSDAY: The Divine Parent and Marriage Partner (*Isa. 54:5*)

Memory Text: *Romans 15:4, NIV.*

Sabbath Gem: Within the pages of His Word, God has unfolded His plans and purposes for families.

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