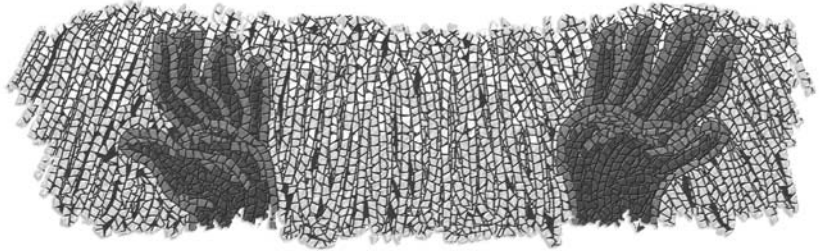


Praise *and* Prayer



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?

Key Text: *Ephesians 1:16-18*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that prayer is not merely a last resort when one has exhausted all other options.
2. To understand that praise of God is a significant and indispensable part of prayer.
3. To emphasize the importance of prayer and communion with God in the life of the church.

Lesson Outline:

I. Prayer for the Right Reasons (*Eph. 1:19*)

- A. The blessings we receive in our life come, ultimately, from God.
- B. Having received salvation is the greatest blessing of all.
- C. As receivers of blessings from God, we should pray for—and actively seek—ways to use these blessings for the good of others.

II. Prayer as Praise (*Eph. 1:20, 21*)

- A. Praise of God partially consists of efforts to live in a way worthy of Him.
- B. We are to praise God for His acts and also for His attributes—goodness, power, etc.
- C. All of God’s praiseworthy attributes are seen in the life of Christ.

III. Prayer and the Church (*Eph. 1:21, 22*)

- A. Christ’s life exists on earth through the church.
- B. The church should be an example of the kingdom of God among us.
- C. The prayers of the church as a body are extremely significant to God.

Summary: While God, in the strictest sense, does not need our prayers and praise, we need to pray to Him and praise Him. All the blessings we receive in our individual and collective lives stem from Him, and prayer helps to draw our attention to the fact. Prayer also enables us to be partners with God in His continuing work in the world.

COMMENTARY

Ephesians 1:1-14, a single sentence in Greek, contains Paul’s doxology of praise and thanksgiving. Verses 15-23, again one long sentence, present Paul’s intercessory prayer for the Ephesian believers. Prayer is the highway to God, and we must approach it with great care and reverence. No meaningless cliché, no empty phrase, no simplistic ritual will do. This week’s study deals with two parts of Paul’s prayer: thanksgiving (*Eph. 1:15, 16*) and intercession (*Eph. 1:17-22*).

I. Paul’s Thanksgiving (*Eph. 1:15, 16*)

Thanksgiving is a notable hallmark of Paul’s prayers. He thanks

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*).

God for the believers in Rome whose faith was known globally (*Rom. 1:8*); for God's grace that revealed Christ among the Corinthians (*1 Cor. 1:4-7*); for the perseverance of faith among the Thessalonians even in the midst of affliction (*2 Thess. 1:3, 4*).

Paul has reason for thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers. "Wherefore," he says (*Eph. 1:15*). The Greek word may be translated "for this reason." The reason is that Paul has heard of their faith in Jesus and of their love for one another. What Paul heard must have brought him much joy—as it would to any evangelist. An evangelist goes to a city, proclaims the gospel, and the Holy Spirit moves many—sometimes hundreds or thousands—to accept the gospel. But after the evangelist leaves, the emotional bond is broken, the nurturing process may be defective, and the number of believers slowly dwindles away. Faith in Jesus has numerous competitors, and this must have been so in the city where Diana was worshiped. But, in spite of that potential, the believers have been faithful in the Lord and loving to the saints. No greater reason exists for an evangelist's joy and thanksgiving!

Faith as belief about Christ is one thing; faith as believing in Christ and being faithful to Him is entirely another. Many would have no hesitation in believing Christ to be a great teacher, a moralist, and even as one god among many. But to accept Him as the Lord of one's life, to believe and trust in Him as the sole way of salvation and the only reason for existence—that is the kind of faith for which Paul lauds the Ephesians. "For to me to live is Christ" was Paul's motto (*Phil. 1:21*).

"Love unto all the saints" (*Eph. 1:15*) is the second reason for Paul's thanksgiving. The word *all* must not be missed. Here's a church with a mixed congregation: Jews and Gentiles. Paul preached Jesus as One who broke the dividing walls between the two, and that truth had held its power among the Ephesians. They loved all the saints. Where such love is practiced, no power on earth can disrupt the unity or the vitality of the church.

II. Paul's Intercession (*Eph. 1:17-22*)

Intercessory prayer is vital for spiritual growth. Paul intercedes for the Ephesians for three things.

First, wisdom and revelation for a better understanding of God. With the arrival of the gospel, Ephesian believers understood the true nature of God, as distinguished from the only deity that Ephesus had known, Diana, a goddess made of human hands, an idol at whose feet Ephesus lay prostrate. But the gospel brought to them the true nature of God—Creator, personal, loving, and One who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. Ephesian Christians believed in this great revelation. To them to know God is to know Him personally, to relate to Him intimately, and to affirm Him as the Director and Leader of their life affairs. Even so, one cannot know

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?

God fully. That will be our study for eternity. But for now, Paul intercedes with God that He may give them a little more of an understanding of His nature and purpose, a little better understanding of what He has already revealed through the Scriptures. As the human mind accepts what is revealed, more will be revealed. The apostle desires that believers should be growing—not static—Christians.

Second, for an enlightenment of the hope of their calling and the glory of their inheritance. The hope of the believer is not an empty hope, a pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by utopia. The Christian hope to which the believer is called is anchored in the Lord Jesus. It embraces both the present and the future: The present hope is to assure us that in Christ life is safe and secure and that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (*Rom. 8:28, NKJV*); the second, because Christian hope points to the future inheritance when our

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 1:37; Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:12-16; Colossians 4:5; James 3:13, 17*

① When a caterpillar spins its cocoon around itself, it gives no evidence that it will be transformed into a beautiful butterfly. How similar that is to the way we are when we first accept Christ! Yet, God seeks to change us from self-seeking humans into caring, serving agents of His kingdom. Describe how this transformation happens (*Eph. 1:15-23, 2:10*). What kind deeds can you do this week to show God’s love in a practical way?

② Take a moment to write a definition for the word *power*. Check your definition with a dictionary. Now compare it with the biblical definition and manifestation of *power* (*Eph. 1:19-21*). How does your definition reflect God’s description? In what ways is your definition different? How would you describe the trustworthiness of God’s power to someone who needs it?

③ The church is not really a building. It is a group of people who are called out of the world. As a unit, we are “his [Christ’s] body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (*Eph. 1:23, NIV*). What spiritual gifts are evident in your church? How are these gifts being used to fulfill the gospel commission? In what ways are you encouraged as you consider what God has done in/through your church? If you were to plan a worship service to highlight God’s saving activity made active through your church family, what would you include?

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?

blessed Lord shall return to take us home, that where He is there we may be also (*John 14:1-3*).

Third, Paul prays that the Ephesians may understand “the exceeding greatness” (Eph. 1:19) *of the power of Jesus*. The apostle refers to two kinds of Christ’s power: the Resurrection power (Eph. 1:20) and the eschatological power (vss. 21, 22). Both are crucial for the understanding of the ultimate victory in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. The Resurrection power guaranteed the vanquishing of death and Satan. The empty tomb is forever the fitting answer to Satan’s accusation in heaven that Jesus did not deserve the position of equality with the Father. When Jesus arose from the dead, He showed to the universe that He is God and in

Witnessing

Ask just about anybody how important communication is in today’s world, and you will likely hear that the ability to stay in close contact is an essential part of everyday life. It is critical to be able to reach your coworkers or department head when you need to close a big deal; it is vital to be able to reach your children’s school in the event of an emergency; it is imperative that you take the call from your doctor with your latest test results. Whatever adjective we might use to describe the urgency we have to communicate, the need is real.

When human beings are in trouble, when they require reassurance, when they need to talk to a friend, there is one way to make an instant connection with Someone who has all the answers, who is available 24/7/365, and who is waiting to take the call. His name and number are available to everyone; and He has shared clear instructions on how to reach Him. He is God Almighty, and the instant connection to Him is through prayer.

Helping nonbelievers connect with God through prayer is a blessing and a privilege. Assisting them in understanding that prayer opens their hearts and minds to God’s love and His gift of eternal life. As supplicants, show them they may talk with God at any time: while riding a bus, weeding the garden, attending a meeting, ironing a shirt.

This week, make a point of inviting at least two nonbelievers to join you in prayer. Gently teach them to pray as Jesus taught while here on earth.

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (*Matt. 6:9-13*).

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"?

Him is life “original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

The eschatological power by which all things are put under Jesus’ feet is the final and ultimate vindication that Christ is Lord over and above all things (*Eph. 1:22*). Paul’s prayer is that Christians will understand that genuine power rests with Jesus, both in saving us from sin and in restoring all things to God. Because of that, the Ephesians must stand assured that their choice of Jesus over Diana is one that guarantees their eternal inheritance in God’s kingdom.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: In the 70s there was a TV program called *Mission Impossible*. A team of special agents accomplished “impossible” things to rescue people. What courageous things have you done in your life? Why do those things seem so small compared to the great things God wants to accomplish through us? In what ways have you made Luke 1:37 a motto for your life?

Thought Question:

Salespeople take every opportunity they can to make a sale. Because of this reputation, we usually try to avoid them. Paul invites us to be proactive on behalf of the gospel. “Make the most of every opportunity” (*Col. 4:5, NIV*), he encourages, when talking with people who have not heard about Christ. What is the difference between selling goods and sharing the good news? How can we be wise and understanding servants of Jesus instead of pushy, obnoxious salespeople?

Application Question:

In Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church, he asks for some powerful interventions in their lives. Review Ephesians 1:17-19. What does it mean to have your heart be “enlightened” and to “know the hope” (*NIV*) to which you have been called? How has God’s “incomparably great power” (*vs. 19, NIV*) been worked out in your spiritual journey? Write Paul’s prayer on a card or in your appointment book. Ask God very specifically to bless your life with understanding from the Holy Spirit. Keep a record of how He answers this prayer.

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?