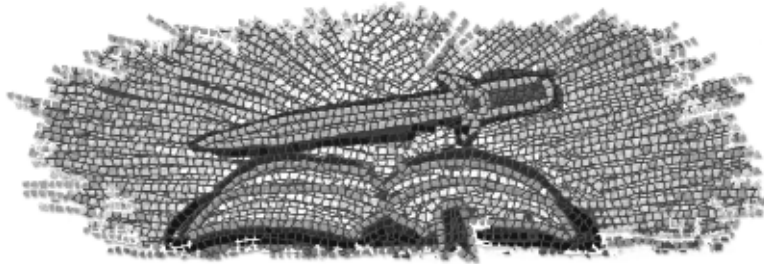


The Christian Conversation and Actions



SABBATH—DECEMBER 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Psalm 119:9, 11; Mark 13:32, 33; Ephesians 6:17-24; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 5:8, 9.

MEMORY VERSE: “At all times pray by the power of the [Holy] Spirit. Pray all kinds of prayers. Be watchful, so that you can pray. Always keep on praying for all of God’s people” (Ephesians 6:18, NIV).

COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIOR. In Ephesians, Paul has talked about everything from the beginning of our life to the mystery of the Cross that established Christ’s church. He has talked about the joy of salvation and the responsibility of Christian living. He has talked about the creation of a new people to spiritual war. All that Paul has talked about we can find in other Bible verses. Without the Bible and the leading of the Holy Spirit, we would have no knowledge of God’s will and His purposes for us. It is through the Bible that God speaks directly to us.

God speaks to us. But we also must speak to God. The Christian life requires both listening to what God says in the Bible and speaking to Him through prayer. The Bible and prayer give us power to fight Satan and to stay on God’s path. This week, we will study what Paul says about the power of the Bible. (The Bible is often called God’s Word.)

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: What does the Bible do for Christians? What part does the Bible play in the battle against sin? Why must Christians be watchful? What part does prayer have in our battle against sin?

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

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 25**THE WORD (THE BIBLE)¹ AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (Ephesians 6:17).**

Read Ephesians 6:17. Paul talks about the Word of God (the Bible) last in the six pieces that make up the Christian armor. But it is not his plan to make the Bible the least important part of that armor. The Bible is the basis of Christian living. Without the Bible, we would not know who God is and who we are. We would not know how we came to be and what is wrong with us. Neither would we know how we are saved from sin, what God has done through Christ, nor what our final end will be. History shows that when the Bible is neglected, even for a short time, there will be spiritual darkness. This is true in individual lives. This is also true in the church as a group. There is no doubt why Paul says the Bible is so important to us in fighting life's spiritual battles.



Do not neglect the Bible.

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

2 Peter 1:20, 21 _____

John 14:26 _____

1 Corinthians 2:10 _____

God shows Himself to us in different ways (Hebrews 1:1-3). The wonder of the heavens, the beauties of nature, and the marvel (wonder) of life all point to the Creator-God (Psalm 33:6-9). But the best ways He shows Himself to us are through His Son Jesus and through the Bible. Through Jesus, God brought us salvation from sin. The Bible teaches us about salvation in Jesus (John 1:1-3, 14; John 5:39; John 17:17; Romans 15:4). The Bible makes us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15, NKJV).

Read what Paul says about the Bible's part in the Christian life: “God

¹the Bible—Jesus and His disciples and the early Christians did not have the Bible as we know it today. At first, they had only the Old Testament. Later, the early Christians also had the books of the New Testament. Bible experts are not exactly sure when the Bible as we know it came to be.

has breathed life into all of Scripture [the Bible]. It [the Bible] is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, a man of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NlrV).

What things in your culture have weakened trust in the Bible? What can you do to protect yourself and others against these things?

MONDAY—DECEMBER 26

THE SWORD AND THE BATTLE (Matthew 4:1-11).

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus showed us how we may depend upon the Bible in the war with Satan. Jesus' experience in the wilderness teaches us two important lessons. First, spiritual war is real. None of God's children can escape Satan's anger. Satan does not attack people who do not believe in God. The closer we are to God, the more Satan tries to get us on his side (Job 1; Job 2).

Second, just knowing the Bible is not enough. We must know the Author of the Bible and trust in His promises. Satan tried to use the Bible to get Jesus to doubt God's promises and will. But Jesus trusted the Bible and followed God's way. "Jesus met Satan with the words of the Bible. 'It is written,' Jesus said. In every tempta-

tion, His weapon was the Bible. Satan demanded that Christ work a miracle as a sign He was God. But greater than all miracles was Jesus' full dependence upon a 'Thus saith the Lord.' What God says cannot be changed. So long as Christ believed this, Satan could not win."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120.

From the verses below, see how the Word of God (the Bible) helps us in overcoming Satan's attacks:

Deuteronomy 8:3 _____

Matthew 4:4 _____

Hebrews 4:12 _____

2 Peter 1:4 _____

Psalm 119:9, 11 _____

The Holy Spirit helps us to have the new-birth experience (John 3:3-8). The Holy Spirit is the seal and guarantee of that experience (Ephesians 1:13, 14). The Holy Spirit lives in us (Romans 8:9, 11, 14; 2 Corinthians 1:22). It changes our minds (Romans

12:1, 2). It helps us understand the Bible (Ephesians 1:17-23; John 16:13). It is the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Bible. This Holy Spirit gives us the power to take up the Bible as a sword to fight off Satan's attacks. The Christian soldier must use the Bible. The Bible is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV). We must use the Bible to cut through sin, to see right from wrong, and to tell the difference between God's voice and Satan's whispers. That is what makes the Bible a weapon of both defense² and offense.³

"Your word [the Bible] I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11, NKJV). That is the testimony of the psalmist. That is the experience of Jesus. What has been *your* experience with the Bible in overcoming Satan's attacks?



Is God's Word hidden in your heart?

²defense—to fight back against an enemy after that enemy has attacked you first.

³offense—to attack an enemy before that enemy attacks you.

⁴Christian—the name of the main character in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

⁵humiliation—being very humble because of so many disappointments and because of all your sins.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 27

PRAYER AND CHRISTIAN WARFARE (Ephesians 6:18).

In his book *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan describes a heart-touching scene. In this scene, Christian⁴ meets Apollyon in the great valley of Humiliation.⁵ Apollyon, a symbol of Satan's forces, sets out to crush the saints on their march to God's kingdom. Apollyon attacks Christian with every weapon he has. Armed with the sword of the Holy Spirit, Christian puts up a brave fight. In the middle of the deadly fight, Christian loses his sword. Apollyon is glad that Christian's doom is sealed. But Christian turns to another tested weapon called All-prayer. So the battle continues. Christian uses All-prayer skillfully and defeats Apollyon. Christian then shouts a powerful shout of victory!

Read Ephesians 6:18. Paul tells the Ephesians to pray. But he gives the Ephesians another warning. This warning is connected to prayer. What is this warning? Why is this warning so important? Also read Mark 13:33; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 5:8, 9.

Paul does not list prayer as part of the Christian armor. But he recognizes that prayer is necessary to

Christian life and victory. “Praying always . . . being watchful to this end,” he says (Ephesians 6:18, NKJV). Prayer is a very important part of Christian daily living. Prayer also has a connection to the end of world history. Prayer gives strength for today. Prayer offers hope for the coming end-time events.⁶ God’s armor is truth, righteousness (holiness), peace, faith, salvation, and the Bible. With this armor and prayer, we will be victorious over Satan.

Perhaps the greatest example of prayer is Jesus’ prayer life. Jesus spent 40 days fasting⁷ and praying. Fasting, praying, and His trust in the Bible helped Jesus get ready to defeat Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus also prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. There He poured out His soul in great suffering to know and obey God’s will. Praying helped Him get ready for the great battle on the cross (Matthew 26:36-46).



Jesus is our example in prayer.

⁶events—things that happen.

⁷fasting—not eating. We can also fast from (go without) other things such as television or the Internet. We fast to be especially close to God instead. Christians fast when they are facing a special time of trouble or a great temptation.

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

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 28

PRAYER AND CHRISTIAN VICTORY (Ephesians 6:18-20).

Most nonbelievers think prayer is a person’s search for God. To nonbelievers, prayer is a search for the unknown. But the Bible says prayer is our answer to the Bible. God has spoken. He has promised. “Ask,” God commands (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9). We respond (answer) to His command with prayer. To a Christian, prayer is not the first word. Prayer is the second word. The first word is always God’s Word (the Bible). Standing on the promises of God, we must pray. Listening to what God says in the Bible and trying to find Him in prayer completes our communication with Him.

We often connect prayer with our personal needs, our children, and our families. If a person is closer to our hearts, we think of that person more often in our prayers. That is natural. There is nothing wrong with that. But it is wrong when we pray for just a certain few people. It is wrong if we do not also pray for our neighbors,

our community, our church, and for the Second Coming. Praying for others is not just being kind. Praying for others shows we believe God's family is for all people.

Read Ephesians 6:18-20. Then write what these verses teach about how to pray, what to pray for, and when to pray.

Think about Paul's personal note to the Ephesians. He asks them to pray for him. But he does not ask them to pray he will be freed from jail. He does not ask them to pray he have better clothes or better food. Instead, he asks that they pray for him to be a bold witness⁸ for Christ and that he might be bold as he preaches the good news (Ephesians 6:20). What a humble but powerful look into the mind of someone who is dead to self.

“Never stop praying” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NlrV) means that we need to plan our lives according to God's will. Then at any time and any place we will follow His will. In this way, our life itself becomes a prayer. How high is prayer on your “to do” list? What changes might you need to make so you can make prayer an important part of your life?

⁸witness—when we live the way a Christian should live and when we tell others about Jesus, we are a witness.

⁹common—sharing the same interest or experience.

¹⁰Gentile—a person who is not a Jew.

¹¹the road to Damascus—Paul was on his way to Damascus to arrest and kill more Christians. There, Jesus made an appearance and scolded Paul for persecuting (attacking) Christians. Afterward, Paul became a Christian and worked to win souls for Christ the rest of his life. Read Acts 9:1-19.

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 29

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER (Ephesians 6:21-23).

Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with a heart-warming greeting in the name of Jesus. This is also the way he began the letter. We know there is no other name by which we may be saved except by the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). It is important to understand there is no other name by which we can have a good relationship with God and with one another. When we understand this, we can have a united church. A united church is in Christ. Being in Christ is a truth that runs through the letter to the Ephesians. With that truth, Paul closes his great call for unity.

The closing verses of Ephesians share three parts of Christian character:

1. A common⁹ fellowship. With gentle words, Paul introduces the Ephesians to the messenger carrying Paul's letter to them: “Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (Ephesians 6:21, NKJV). Tychicus was a Gentile.¹⁰ Before meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus,¹¹ Paul could not have said those words about Tychicus. But in Christ crucified, Paul saw the walls between Jews and

the Gentiles come down (Ephesians 2:14-18). Paul accepted Tychicus as a beloved brother in Christ and a faithful minister. In this close relationship, we see the glory of a common fellowship.

2. A common concern. The church reaches across all borders to share a common concern. The early Christian church had a custom of exchanging greetings, sharing news, and helping other churches in need. So Paul tells the Ephesians that Tychicus will give them a report on how the church in Rome is doing. Such reports contribute to an understanding of the world.

3. A common heritage.¹² The Christian heritage is an endless gift. This heritage comes “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” to all people who love the Lord “in sincerity” (Ephesians 6:23, 24, NKJV) or “with undying love” (RSV). Following Jesus requires a continuing relationship between believers and Him. “‘Remain joined to me, and I will remain joined to you,’” said Jesus (John 15:4, NIV). Christians must have that undying, continuing love relationship with Jesus. Those who do, are those who receive the heritage of peace, love, faith, and grace. With those great words, each word is a jewel from God’s heavenly throne room, Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians.

What does Paul’s reason for sending Tychicus to Ephesus show about Paul’s character? What does his reason tell us about what Christian character should be? Also read Matthew 4:23-25; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:4; 1 John 3:16.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 30

ADDITIONAL STUDY: *The importance of prayer:* “Prayer is the breath of the soul. Prayer is the channel of all blessings. As . . . the repentant¹³ person prays, God sees that person’s struggles and marks his or her sincere pleas. He has His finger upon that person’s pulse. He takes note of every throb. God does not fail to know every feeling, every emotion, every sin, and every thought and purpose of that person. That person was purchased at a priceless cost. God cherishes that person’s soul with a love that can never be changed . . .” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Maranatha*, p. 85.

Praying always: Pray often to your heavenly Father. The more you pray, the closer you will come to God. The Holy Spirit will serve as an interpreter for the person who prays sincerely, but who cannot speak his or her ideas clearly. The heart will be softened and touched by the love of God. The clouds and shadows Satan puts upon

¹²heritage—things that come to us from our father and mother. God is our Father. Our heritage is from His peace, love, et cetera.

¹³repentant—being sorry for your sins and turning away from your sins.

the person will disappear by the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness (holiness). Jesus is that Sun. The mind and heart will be made bright by Jesus' light."—Adapted from 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. In class, compare¹⁴ the lists you made at the end of Tuesday's lesson. What have you learned from these lists? What wrong ideas might some people have about prayer? In what ways might we not recognize the value and power of prayer?
2. If we are saved by grace, why is Christian character such an important part of our faith?
3. Suppose your class were to write a letter to your local church warning them to be watchful. What important things would you advise them to watch for? If you were to write a letter to the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, what would you write?

¹⁴compare—show how things are the same.