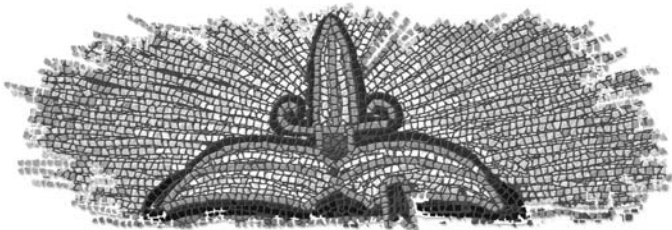


The Christian Communion and Conduct



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?”

Key Texts: *Psalm 114:105, 1 Thessalonians 5:17*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show how God communicates with us through His Word.
2. To show how we respond to God through prayer.
3. To reveal the Word of God and prayer as vital weapons against sin and temptation.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Word of God (*2 Tim. 3:16, 17*)

- A. The Word of God points us to Christ, who is our salvation.
- B. God's Word is our standard for Christian living.
- C. God's Word is our defense against sin and temptation.
- D. We understand the Word of God through the indwelling Spirit of God.

II. Prayer—Our Response to God (*Eph. 6:18*)

- A. The Bible admonishes us to pray and to be watchful.
- B. Prayer is essential for Christian living and for victory over sin.
- C. We respond to the Word of God through prayer.

III. Christian Character Defined in Christ (*1 Pet. 1:15, 1 Tim. 4:12*)

- A. Our relationship with God and with one another is established in Christ.
- B. In Christ we have common fellowship, common concerns, and a common heritage.
- C. In Christ we live a life of service to one another.

Summary: By daily communion with God, through His Word and through prayer, we are able to withstand sin and temptation. These channels of communication with the Father can only be found in Christ, by the indwelling Spirit of God. In Christ, we also can develop true Christian character through our heritage and fellowship with one another and through bearing one another's burdens.

COMMENTARY

The Christian life and victory in the war against Satan require that we be in continual contact with God, who has set up a communication system for us to keep in touch with Him and draw strength from Him: His Word through which He speaks to us, prayer through which we speak to Him, and our conduct through which we testify of Him.

Paul's closing of the Epistle is a call for the Christian to live by the Spirit, live through prayer, and live in love.

I. Live by the Spirit (*Eph. 6:17b*)

The apostle Paul places the sword of the Spirit as the last of the six pieces that make up the Christian armor (*vss. 13-17*). While the

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?

other five are defensive in nature, this one is offensive, and Paul identifies the sword of the Spirit as the Word of God. The Bible, whose origin is attributed to the Holy Spirit (*2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:21*), not only makes us “wise unto salvation” (*2 Tim. 3:15*). It is the means through which God reveals His will and speaks to us. Even as we listen to the still, small voice of God breaking out of its sacred pages, its words are given “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (*2 Tim. 3:17*). It is with this Word that Christ defeated Satan in the wilderness temptations (*Matt. 4:4, 7, 10, 11*). “By what means did He overcome in the conflict with Satan?” asks Ellen White. “By the word of God. Only by the word could He resist temptation. ‘It is written,’ He said. . . . Every promise in God’s word is ours. ‘By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’ are we to live. When assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All its strength is yours. ‘Thy word,’ says the psalmist, ‘have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.’ ‘By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.’ Ps. 119:11; 17:4.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 123.

One caution, however. To know the Bible does not make it the sword. We must know the Author of the Bible, trust Him, and continually obey His demands. The soul that is so anchored in the Bible will lead a life against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

II. Live Through Prayer (*Eph. 6:18*)

Prayer is universal to all religions, but the difference between biblical prayer and other forms of prayer is that the former is a response to a promise of a personal God, and the latter are petitions to an impersonal, speculative force or ideology. The former is a dialogue; the latter is a monologue, such as the Pharisee’s prayer with himself (*Luke 18:11*). Prayer is speaking with God, listening to His voice, and rising up in full empowerment of God’s strength. It demands nothing of ourselves—except to deny self, lean on His strength, and wait on Him. Out of that waiting flows the power with which we can live the Christian journey and fight the spiritual warfare.

Although Paul does not list prayer as part of the armor, he does not fail to point out that none of the six parts of the armor can come to our defense without the power of prayer. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane assures the victory of the Cross. Prayer precedes the putting on the armor, holds the armor in place, and enables the armor to crush the forces of the enemy.

Paul considers prayer so important in the Christian life and warfare that he includes four universals: Pray always; pray with supplication in the Spirit; pray watchfully; pray for all the saints (*see Eph. 6:18*). Like the Pharisee (*Luke 18:11*), we often are tempted to pray for show, for ourselves, or simply as a routine. Paul would have none of it. Effective prayer is self-denying, Spirit-filled, intercessory,

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.

pleading for the needs of others, and, above all, for the fulfillment of God’s will on earth by being His faithful ambassadors, whether free or in chains (*vs. 20*). To keep foremost God’s priority and to keep ourselves in tune with God at all times, and in all places—this is the substance of Paul’s plea for prayer by both the individual Christian and the Christian community.

III. Live in Love (*Eph. 6:23, 24*)

Ephesians 1:1-4 contain the words *grace*, *love*, and *peace*. The closing two verses of Ephesians also have the same words. Of the three, the word *love* expresses most poignantly and, indeed, summarizes the theme of the Epistle that all believers are one in Christ and must live in love.

Paul sends the Epistle to Ephesus through Tychicus, “a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (*vs. 21*). Tychicus is charged to tell the Ephesian church all about Paul in prison and to be a comfort to the church.

Tychicus was a slave, and Paul had a pharisaic background. A potential wall of hatred and division stood between the two. But

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 43:1-3, 10, 11; Mark 13:33; John 14:26; Ephesians 6:17-24; 2 Timothy 3:15-17*

❶ Recall a time when someone recommended a book that was a waste of your time to read. How did this impact your response to other suggestions this person might have given? How would you describe the benefits of reading the Bible? What information have you found in its pages? Would colleagues from work or neighbors trust you enough to act on your recommendation to explore God’s Word for themselves?

❷ A sword is an instrument of battle that makes victory possible. Even though we witness evidence of God in nature and miracles, we still need to know God’s Word. Jesus even promises that the Holy Spirit will help us to remember promises and concepts in times of need (*see John 14:26*). What Scripture passages have you memorized that have blessed and helped you in times of distress?

❸ In our memory text for this lesson, Ephesians 6:18, Paul uses the word *all* three times. Discuss the implications of this word. Consider time constraints and attitudes that dull our fervor and prevent our being totally inclusive with our prayers. Why is constant prayer as critical to our spiritual well-being as breathing is to our physical life?

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?

Paul's meeting Jesus on the Damascus road led him to the discovery that the Cross had demolished the wall of partition. This new-found truth led Paul to cross out the word *Gentile* against Tychicus and introduce him as an equal—a “beloved brother and faithful minister” (*Eph. 6:21*). *Transition* from one status to the other is the mystery of God—the mystery of the gospel of relations, the gospel of love without boundaries. Upon all those who accept and practice such a gospel, the apostle pronounces a benediction of love, peace, and grace (*vss. 6:23, 24*).

Witnessing

Each January, thousands of people resolve to make a difference in their lives by pledging to *change*. Perhaps some make a commitment to stop smoking, lose weight, exercise more often, spend more time with loved ones, volunteer for a favorite cause—the list is endless.

However, there is one resolution that tops the list: making the commitment to spend more quality time with God. Since the commitment has been made, why not take it one step further? Invite others to join you who have a real need to know God.

Depending on the group dynamics, the best place to start might be with an informal gathering at home for a systematic reading of the entire Bible. Start with the New Testament, since the four Gospels are a wonderful introduction of God's great love for His sinful, earthly children. Discuss ways to apply God's love to specific situations people in your group are facing.

Another way to spend special time with God is through regular church and Sabbath School attendance. Again, this is a perfect opportunity to invite others to come along.

Studying the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* on a regular basis and reading the *Adventist Review* from cover to cover (and sharing it with coworkers, friends, neighbors, etc.) are all ways to stay in touch with our heavenly Father and with the activities and blessings of His remnant church.

Last of all, the most precious way to reach up to God is through prayer, either in a group or one on one with Him. *Earnest* prayer opens up our hearts and minds and allows God to reach in . . . and to stay.

Talking with Him is possible anytime, day or night. It is possible anywhere, and there are no such things as a busy signal or voice mail. No prayer is too brief, too quiet, or too simple not to be heard by the Father and recorded in heaven. And we can count on every prayer being answered—in God's way, in His time.

So, the commitment to building a stronger relationship with God has started with the new year. Keep the momentum going. Pledge to a lifetime of closer walks and talks with Him.

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.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: At Pathfinder club meetings, we learned to march in unison by responding to the verbal commands of our leader. If one Pathfinder turned left when he or she was instructed to turn right, chaos jumbled our previously ordered ranks. Share a Pathfinder, or similar, memory. How do God's commands "Be on guard! Be alert!" (*Mark 13:33, NIV*) keep our lives and our salvation from disintegrating into chaos?

Thought Questions:

❶ People seem to desire fanciful theories and bizarre discoveries. Witness the supermarket tabloids and television specials that share news on the odd and spectacular. People have even used the Bible to support theories that have led to fanaticism and physical harm. Second Timothy 3:15-17 commends Scripture to us as a gift to make us wise to salvation (*see vs. 15*). Discuss the implications this passage has for how to handle God's Word. What is the "good work" (*2 Tim. 3:17, NIV*) Paul indicates as the result of studying the Bible?

❷ Read Ephesians 6:18 several times in as many versions as you have. Discuss what it means to pray "on all occasions" (*NIV*) or "with all perseverance" (*NKJV*). What would be the practical results if we were to "always keep on praying" (*NIV*) for one another? Share the answers to prayer your group has already experienced. Spend a season of prayer together, asking God to multiply His activity on behalf of your congregation and its witness in your community.

Application Question:

One soap maker claims its product is 99.9 percent pure. The psalmist David points us to God's Word as a source of purity and protection from sin (*see Ps. 119:9, 11*). Spend some quiet time with God. Read Scripture passages that talk about who God is. Consider Isaiah 40:21-31. How does recognizing our failure draw us to God, who is ultimately able and completely willing to re-create us in His image? Ask, in a personal way, for Him to cleanse your ways. Covenant to meet your Savior each morning to walk in newness of life and hope through His power and presence.

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?