

Ephesians Chapter 6

Although I did not present last week's teaching, I covered:

- We're to walk in love, light, and wisdom.
- Husbands and wives are to love each other like Christ loved the church

After giving us three chapters of all the incredible blessings the believer in Jesus receives that is completely unearned and undeserved, in chapters four and five the Apostle Paul has been giving us a reasonable response in how we're to live out of appreciation and regard for these blessings. He's equated this response in how we are to walk out our faith. Think of four pillars holding up a roof.

- Walk in Unity
- Walk in Love
- Walk in Light
- Walk in Wisdom

Paul then first applied those four ways to walk to marriage. As I just noted, Paul equated the marriage of Jesus and the church to human marriage. Wives are to love and obey their husbands and husbands are to love their wives and obey Jesus in the same manner He obeyed the Father and loved His church. The key word in a successful loving marriage? Sacrifice. Here in chapter 6, Paul shifts the topic to parents and children.

As I listen to Paul's counsel on marriage and now parenting and children, I've found myself wondering about Paul's qualifications to speak on these subjects. That may sound blasphemous, and it probably is, but this is flawed and cynical Dan talking. Paul was formerly Saul, and he was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. This was the ruling counsel of the Jews. If you were a member of the Sanhedrin, you had to be married. There is no mention of Paul's wife in the Scriptures. Tradition has it that his wife left him when he accepted Jesus as His Lord and Savior. So, on this alone, I find myself asking who is *this* guy to give me advice about marriage and parenting?

The thing I need to remember and the rest of us need to believe is Paul's words are not his – they are God's. Paul confirmed this in his second letter to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (3:16 - NIV) Every word in the Bible is inspired by God Himself. As our Creator, this makes sense. If He loves us, and He does, then He didn't just create us without providing us a life manual that reveals Him, His nature, and His will for each of us.

Pretty much every time I teach, I wonder why anyone would listen to me. I have to remind myself that if I keep the focus on the Scriptures, then whoever is managing to stay awake is listening to God – not me. So, let's hear what God, via the Apostle Paul, has to tell us about our walking out our faith as children and parents.

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: ³ "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Obey and honor your parents. How do you think these commands to children fly in the face of modern-day American culture? Personally, I've seen too much evidence of a complete flip-flop of these commands. It's like, parents, obey and honor your children. Children have so much more power than they did when I was a child. How did they get it? The parents handed it to them as they surrendered the responsibility of disciplining children for the purpose of rearing them into becoming decent and productive human beings.

The source of this surrender was and still is all the liberal teachings that promoted we need to first be friends with our children. I've read the Bible a few times, and I don't find anywhere where we're commanded to be buddies and chums with our children. Somewhere along the way parents have gone from being respected protectors and teachers to weakened servants of our children's endless selfish needs and petulance.

Foolish practices like no longer telling a child "no" because it will hurt their self-esteem isn't raising a more emotionally balanced person. It's setting up that child for a life of frustration when they eventually grow up and see that life is full of "nos." They'll be completely ill-equipped to handle real life. This is the exact opposite of what Paul is writing in these first three verses.

Take note of a good practice that Paul uses when issuing commands to children. When I was a kid, if I even dared to question a directive from my parents, the response was, "Because I said so!" What was the implication behind this blast? "I am god, and you will do whatever I say." In these verses, Paul provides reasons to obey, or the fruit of obedience. He says that obeying and honoring parents is the right thing to do and it comes with a promise that it may be well with them and they may live long on the earth. Obeying commands is much easier when you are promised the results as opposed to hearing, "Because I said so."

⁴ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Interesting that Paul only singles out fathers in this warning. In Paul's day, men played a much more proactive role in the rearing of children. What does he mean by provoking a child to wrath? Psychological studies – legitimate ones – point out that a child's ability to manage his/her emotions is limited until, or nowadays *if*, he or she grows into an adult. Fathers either repeating abusive behavior they learned from their parents or acting out from the frustrations of life, that relentlessly tease, shame, or criticize are how we can provoke a child to wrath or anger.

A big problem in these days is the pushing of activities – such as sports. Before I say anything more, I love sports. I do believe there are great life-lessons that can be gleaned from sports. However, when sports, or any other activity, take over the entirety of a child's life, that child will become one-dimensional. I'm not sure what is the bigger motivator when it comes to pushing a child on sports. One of those motivators is the potential of a pot of gold. Many professional athletes are making millions of dollars, so parents see the hope of their child making the big bucks.

Another motivator is the parent who thought he/she could have been great at something, but they did not achieve that greatness. Therefore, with a child, they're getting a second chance to get him/her to achieve the greatness they couldn't. This is the error of setting unrealistic expectations on a child. My father demanded perfection and when, not if, I didn't achieve it, I was heavily disciplined and shamed. The crazy thing about my father's perfection mindset is he was far from perfect himself.

What Paul is not saying is we should not discipline our children. As I snarkily alluded to earlier, the void of discipline is giving a child a license to act like a terrorist. The absence of discipline is basically telling the flesh to do whatever it wants because there's no development of a sense of conscience or right or wrong. However, discipline should never be administered in an undisciplined manner – such as when we're really upset. Taking the time to cool down and talk it over with your spouse in how to correct bad behavior is good wisdom. If discipline is done lovingly and consistently, there's a better-than-average chance that child is going to grow-up as a productive member of society.

⁵ Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

The nonbelieving world points out sections of Scripture like verses 5-9 as proof of the irrelevancy of the Bible. Other versions of these Scriptures use the word “slaves” instead of bondservants. I don't think I need to spend any time on the rightfully bad imagery of slavery. When we read God's Word, before we judge it, there are things to consider, or context, when interpreting. Slavery was a fact of life in Paul's times. I don't see Paul endorsing slavery in this section at all. He's rightfully dealing with the reality of society. Furthermore, he's not only addressing the slaves, but also he's speaking to the masters.

The real message of this passage is not about what naturally comes to mind when we hear the word slavery. The key word is in verse 5, “bondservants.” In Paul's day, there was indeed slavery. However, at the end of the first seven years of being a slave, that person was given the freedom to choose whether or not he/she wanted to continue to be a slave. They could opt to try to live life on their own. The basis of their decision was, did they think they could find a better life living on their own, or was the life they were living, giving them what they needed?

For those that found that life was comparatively good working for their masters, they would forego their life of freedom and willingly commit to serving that master for the remainder of their lives. Because this decision was an act of their will, they were no longer slaves but now called bondservants. If we keep this context in mind, listening to Paul's instructions takes on a less sinister backdrop. The first thing to note in verse five is Paul's qualification on their master – he/she was their master according to the flesh. I believe the Holy Spirit prodded Paul to use this phrase as a foreshadowing of how we're to conduct ourselves with our Master according to the spirit. Namely, God.

Proof of this foreshadowing is found in his words later in verse five, “with fear and trembling.” We’ll be reading in a couple of weeks in Paul’s letter to the Philippians the same phrase, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Paul even alluded to this mindset and heart-set to himself in 1 Corinthians 2:3, “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.” This concept of serving in fear and trembling comes from Psalm 2:11, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

How do we reconcile serving a God of love and grace with seemingly negative words like fear and trembling? The Old Testament Hebrew word and New Testament Greek word for fear speaks to one of awe and wonder. I think one of the great failings in most modern-day Bible teaching is not enough emphasis is placed on the true awesomeness of the LORD. God is infinite, and we are finite. By that definition alone, fully appreciating the magnitude of God is impossible. However, when we choose to look into the skies at night or look at the power that must be behind a transformed life, these are proofs of God’s worthiness of our looking to Him in awe and wonder.

As for the trembling component, and this is just me speaking, I equate the trembling to my periodic reactions of being overwhelmed by the adversarial forces that are clearly against me. I try not to live my life in fear as I do believe the Apostle John’s words, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.” (1 John 4:18a) God is perfect, and God is love. Therefore, His perfect love should cast out all of the fear in our lives.

If we’re living with fear in our lives, it’s coming from a place of lack of trust or faith in God’s perfect love. What’s reality? Life can be pretty scary at times. For me, the trembling leads me to seek God for help, support, and comfort. The good news? He not only is all of this, but also He wants us to come to Him when we’re trembling. He is our heavenly Father, and He deeply and passionately loves His children.

Paul continues in his encouragement to bondservants that they’re to be doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men. Vickie just recently shared with me some recordings of Charles Stanley’s teachings on the frustrations that come from working for a difficult boss. She did this out of her awareness that I’m dealing with a difficult boss now. Pastor Stanley’s words echoed Paul’s encouragement that my service to my employer and boss should come from a place in my heart that is focused on goodwill as if I’m serving the Lord.

This has been very helpful to me, when I’m wise enough to remember it. If God is in complete control, and He is, then whatever difficulties I’m facing in life, He has orchestrated them for a good purpose. That may seem like an oxymoron, but when we consider that this life is not all there is – when we realize that this life is merely a training ground for eternity, then we can begin to understand that there may be purpose in our trials and suffering. We’re to learn something. As the saying goes, “No pain, no gain.”

For me, the first lesson in any suffering is to force me to go to God in prayer. That’s what He wants! He wants to be our God. He wants to be our Father. I won’t speak for the rest of you, but I’m too stupid or at least less inclined to go to God when things are going well. My greatest lessons from God have come out of my greatest pains. When we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we, perhaps, are

likely not really understanding we are declaring ourselves as bondservants to God. The word “Lord” is interchangeable with the word “Master.” We read that title given to Jesus throughout the Gospels. Simply and bluntly, Jesus is the boss of our lives.

From verse 8, we read, “knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord.” This may sound like a “karma-like” promise. I don’t believe in karma. I believe in the grace of God almighty. That being said, the writer of the book of Hebrews said, “God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6b) I do believe God will reward our sincere and sacrificial works for Him in this life and/or in the next.

Some pastors take license with this teaching as a motivation for people to serve the LORD. I’m not a supporter of this approach. For me, true and sustainable service to God should come from a place of gratitude for all that God has done as we learned in the first three chapters of this epistle. While I do believe what God says regarding rewarding us, I intentionally try not to think about what those might be. I’m already so abundantly blessed that to think or expect God would provide me beyond what He already has can quickly push me into a self-loving/admiring mindset. Nothing good ever comes from there.

In verse nine, Paul turns the tables on his instructions from the bondservants to the masters, “And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” What’s the message here? You may be masters in this life, but you are exactly the same as the bondservants in God’s eyes. This is what Paul is saying by there is no partiality with the LORD. Spiritual arrogance, pride, and racism make no sense to me. God lovingly sees each of us the exact same way – as damaged sinners saved by His grace. You know what skin color He sees on His children? Not white. Not black. Not brown. Blood red – His Son’s atoning blood that has washed away our sins.

When I first read through this chapter, I did not expect to get this much content leading up to this next section. This is the wonder of the Word of God. The writer of Hebrews nailed it when he said, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

I promise for the last time I’ll remind you that the first three chapters were all about what the blessings God has poured out on the undeserving believer in His only begotten Son, Jesus. Many Bible scholars call this the “sitting phase” in the life of a believer. Up until we get to verse ten in this chapter, we’re then to learn how to walk out of gratitude and allegiance for these unearned blessings. Now beginning in verse ten, Paul is preparing us for when the enemy attacks.

Another serious flaw in much of today’s church teachings is the unwillingness to address the reality of spiritual warfare. This physical realm that we live in is not the only realm. There is a spiritual realm, and that realm has a constant war going on between good and evil. Satan is the 5-star general of the evil forces. Thankfully, God is the commander-in-chief of the good forces. Spoiler alert – from an eternal perspective, the war is already won - God won this war. Therefore, if you are on His team – team Jesus, you are on the winning side!

However, here in the physical realm, the war rages on. In every war, it is rare that every battle is won by just one side. It is impossible to truly know how much Satan hates God. The tough news is not only does Satan passionately hate God, but also he passionately hates anything God passionately loves. This means each of us. Therefore, we are the prime targets of Satan's attacks. Even for the strongest and most seasoned Christians, these attacks can be overwhelming. The pain from these attacks makes walking in unity, love, light, and wisdom no longer possible. The best we can hope for is to remain standing. That is what Paul is about to teach us – to stand when the enemy is attacking.

¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Verse 10 should be near the top of every believer's list of key life verses. I'm going to proclaim this to each of you, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." The strength that Paul is invoking is not your own – but the LORD's. This is what He means by "in the Lord and in the power of His might." Please let me share some supporting Scriptures for this marvelous and foundational encouragement:

Exodus 14:14: "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

1 Samuel 17:47: "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's."

1 Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 8:37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Before Paul became an apostle, he was known as Saul. He was a great persecutor of the early church. When Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, He asked him, "Why are you persecuting *Me*?" This is a testimony to how closely Jesus identifies Himself to the church and to each of us who make up His church. Our battles are, spiritually, His battles. That being said, we are in the battle. Paul commands us to put on the whole armor of God.

In verses eleven and twelve, Paul points out the need for the armor. The whole armor's purpose is to allow us to stand against the wiles of the devil. What are these "wiles?" First and foremost, they are deceptions and lies. They are anti-truths. This is who the devil, or Satan, has been since he was kicked out of heaven. One of the tougher things, for at least me, to understand about God, who is omniscient - which means He knows everything, is why would He create a being that would instigate such pain and misery to His greatest and beloved creations – each of us? Perhaps He'll reveal this to us in heaven.

When it comes to spiritual warfare, there are two things to which we need to get a firm grip. First, if Satan isn't attacking now, he's preparing to attack. Such preparations can be subtle planting of seeds of doubt or temptations to sin. Other preparations are for all-out pain such as a bad health diagnosis, the loss of a job, or loss of a beloved one. The second, and more important truth of spiritual warfare that we need to hold onto tightly is God is greater than anything that Satan can attack you with. The closer we draw to God, the greater the attacks will get. That's because in your closeness with the LORD, you are becoming a bigger threat to Satan. We must hold onto the truth that "He [the Holy Spirit] who is in you is greater than he [Satan] who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

Paul provides us some light on the darkness in verse 12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." In other words, our enemies are not people. Our enemies are Satan and his evil minions that are tempting and motivating people to perform evil against us.

Yes, these people have to come into agreement with these evil influences. But if we're to obey Jesus' command to love others as we love ourselves, developing the mindset of our enemies being weapons of Satan, it opens the door for the possibility for us to have some compassion on them. The blunt truth is the only difference between us and the actions of our alleged enemies is we made the choice to believe in Jesus.

I have a hard enough time being an imitator of Christ knowing as much as I do through His Word and how He's revealed Himself through Vickie, my children, grandchildren, and each of you. Without my faith, I'm no better than the people who have inflicted pain and suffering on me via Satan's influences. Paul's underlying message in these verses is that the source of our battles is spiritual, so if we're going to be in a spiritual battle, we're going to need spiritual weaponry. Verse 13 speaks to what I mentioned earlier, we're to stand.

Up on the screen is a visual of the various components that make up the whole armor of God. I like pictures, so I'll keep this up as I go through these components as they each provide a specific defense and protection.



¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

I don't think it's an accident that Paul initiates the description of the whole armor of God with the belt of truth. As I mentioned earlier, Satan's "go to" in terms of attack is deceit and lies. The truth is the antidote to the lie. Jesus bluntly and forcibly tells us in John 17:17 that God's word *is* truth. This is why we must be so committed to knowing, understanding, and believing God's Word is the truth. Without this, we are vulnerable to be deceived.

Paul then brings up the breastplate of righteousness. What part of us is the breastplate covering? Our hearts. Righteousness means doing what's right. I really like what Jon Courson says about the need to protect our hearts, "There's such a wonderful freedom and liberty that comes from knowing you're not intentionally doing things that aren't right, and that your heart is protected by righteousness. Does this mean your heart will never feel convicted? No. But it does mean your heart will never feel condemned."

He goes on to reference John 3:20 and Revelation 12:10 that our own hearts and Satan will condemn us. Condemnation is not fun. It's corrosive to the heart, mind, and soul. Again, invoking God's Word, which is the truth, one of the key components of the breastplate of righteousness is Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Paul now describes a covering of our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. For what purpose to we use our feet? - Primarily to stand and walk. Whether we're standing or walking, we are living, breathing examples of the fruit of the gospel of Jesus Christ. John 3:17 is high on my list of key life verses, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." This is a message of peace. The gospel literally means the good news. The good news is we don't need to be at war with God any longer. One of God's names is Jehovah-Shalom. This means God is peace.

¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Above all does not mean that this is the most important component. It means covering all. One of my favorite movies is "Gladiator." There is a massive fight scene in the beginning where the enemy launches these flaming arrows into the sky hoping that they will land on someone. The movie shows that when these arrows were launched, the men on the receiving end gathered together and held up their shields in a manner that the fiery darts would hit their shields and not cause any harm.

Please forgive me for keep repeating this, but we are in a spiritual battle night and day. The enemy is either subtly or not-so-subtly shooting fiery darts of accusations and temptations at us to harm us. Without faith in Jesus, we are going to look like human fried target boards. I've found faith to be something like education. When you're in school, you're going to class and you're reading/studying the required materials. When do you know if you really understand the material? When the pop quiz or test comes.

So, it goes with faith. We may think we're getting or understanding the promises of God in His Word, but until we face trials, or tests, to see if we really believe what we think we believe, we're not going to truly understand where we are in our faith. The greatest example of this dynamic is Job. God described Job to Satan as, "*There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil.*" God allowed Satan to attack Job and, short of killing him, destroyed his

family, way of life, and health. After all that, we hear, “*In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.*” (Job 1:22)

That is real faith. One more time invoking the writer of the Hebrews in verse 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” For the believer in Jesus Christ, faith is not blind. Faith is substantive, it is evidential, and it brings hope. The fiery darts the enemy will shoot at us are designed to discredit these beautiful truths of faith.

¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Paul reiterated this concept of the helmet of salvation in his first letter to the Thessalonians but added the words “*the hope of*” – the helmet of *the hope of* salvation. What is the hope of salvation? Yes, it is the promise of going to heaven when we die. That alone is amazing. The deeper and more personal hope is the reconciliation of an unfettered and fully forgiven relationship with our Creator.

In other words, the hope of salvation is we are placed on a path that will lead us back to our original design as Adam and Eve had it in the Garden of Eden before their fateful nosh. We have this hope because of what the truth is – what the Word of God promises.

¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

With all this armor at our access, there is one more weapon, and I believe it is at the heart of our relationship with God – prayer. Again, quoting Paul from his first epistle to the Thessalonians, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Paul reminds us in verse 18 of today’s text that our prayers are not to just be for ourselves but for all the saints. Every child of God is related via Jesus. If He loved us enough to save each of us, then we need to come alongside the rest of our fellow sinners-saved-by-grace and pray for them.

Paul concludes his teaching with a reminder that he is writing this from prison. More importantly, he’s not guilty of what he’s been accused of. Not many things make my blood boil faster than being wrongfully accused. Yet here we have wrongfully accused, innocent Paul not thinking about his offenses. He’s focused on speaking boldly about the mystery of the gospel. He even finishes with his sense of obligation to do God’s will, “As I ought to speak.” May I one day get to such a place of maturity in my faith.

²¹ But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; ²² whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts. ²³ Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

Paul finishes this letter with a personal message that his brother in the ministry, Tychicus, will give the Ephesian churches more of an update on him beyond this letter. He concludes with a beautiful benediction we all need to hear much more than we do, so I'll repeat it, "Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

Questions:

- What does the truth that all Scripture is God-breathed mean to you?
- Why is it important that children honor their fathers and mothers?
- Put up the picture of the armor of God. Which of the components of the armor of God means the most to you?

Next week, we get into chapter 1 of Paul's letter to the Philippians.