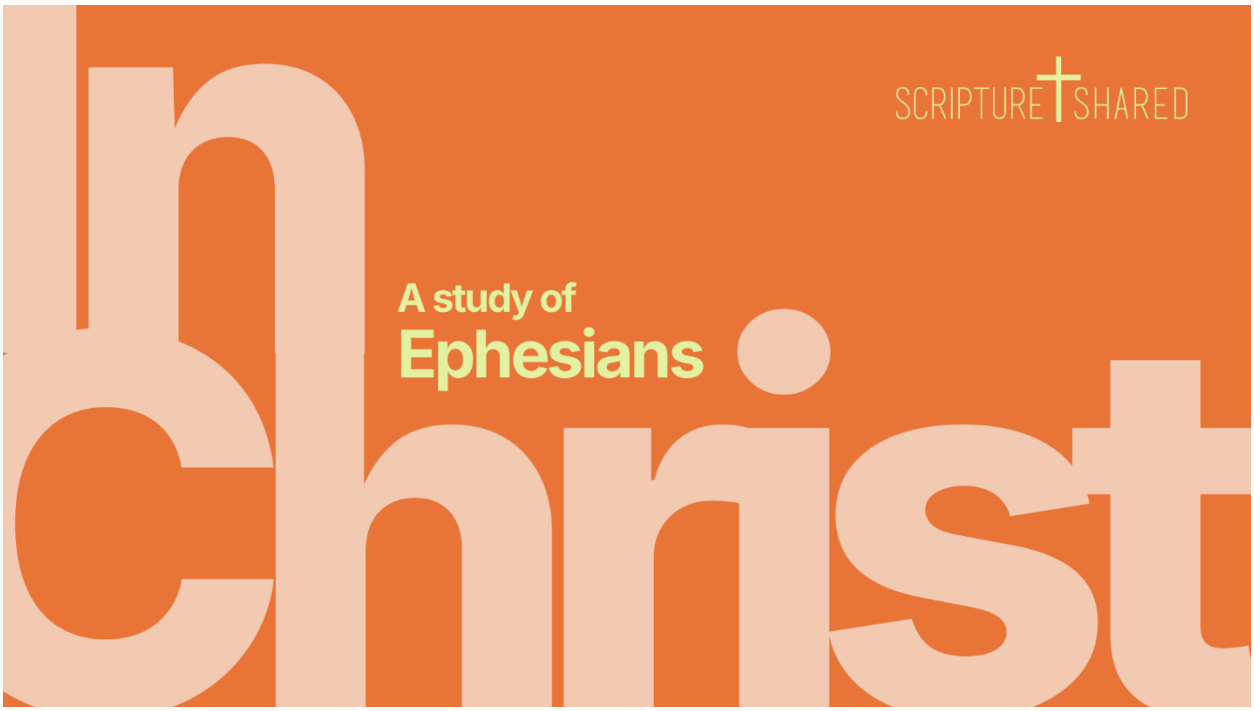


Week 6

Week 6, Day 1

Ephesians 6:1-4
1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord,[a] for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"—this is the first commandment with a promise— 3 "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." 4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Understanding the Passage:
Once, in high school, my dad and I needed to replace a gasket on our washing machine. We got up early, and my dad taught me what to do so I could do it on my own later in life. We were assembling the last few pieces when I noticed that something looked off. This little plastic chute, which was normally pointed down, was pointed up. I thought about saying something, but my dad was a much better repairman than I; certainly, he knew what he was doing. I chalked my observation up to misremembering. He sent me to get some laundry, but when I came back, he was mopping water off the ceiling. Turns out that little chute I noticed was the chute that sprays water into the machine. Since it was upside down, it sprayed all that water onto our ceiling.

I learned two important lessons that day. 1) My dad was not as all-knowing as I had believed. But more importantly was 2) that despite being young and still learning how to do something, I still had something to contribute.

Paul in this section makes the argument that because of being filled with the Holy Spirit, our relationships have to look different. Whether it's in marriage (5:21-33), with kids (6:1-4), or the servant/master (6:5-9) relationship of the ancient world, all of these relationships now have to look like mutual submission: "be subject to one another" (5:21) rather than lording over each other.

One of the things we can miss with our 21st-century eyes is how radical Paul's command was here. In the ancient Roman world, children were not viewed in the high regard we hold them for today. Ancient Romans didn't hold the same developmental model of childhood that we know; instead, children were miniature adults in need of strict discipline so that they would grow up correctly. All kinds of practices which we would deem well beyond unacceptable were commonplace back then.

So, Paul takes quite a radical stance when he tells Christians parents to "not provoke your children in anger." Not to take up the kind of discipline that brings about anger and ultimately destruction in their kids. Instead, to find ways of building them up in ways that are more Christ-like.

Thankfully, the culture we live in is naturally more nurturing toward children. But there are still so many ways we can heed Paul's word of mutuality.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. How can we treat the young people in our church with mutual submission?
2. What is a lesson you learned from someone younger than you?

Week 6, Day 2

Ephesians 6:5-9

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ, 6 not with a slavery performed merely for looks, to please people, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul. 7 Render service with enthusiasm, as for the Lord and not for humans, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are enslaved or free. 9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Lord in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Understanding the Passage:

Paul concludes his address to three major household relationships here. The scholar Ben Witherington III writes that this passage in Ephesians is "a perfect example…of how a superficial treatment of the material will lead to conclusions opposite to what is intended. Paul is not endorsing slavery or providing a Christian rationale to bolster and undergird the institution. On the contrary, he is trying to reform an existing institution within the context of the Christian household." It can be hard for us with our 21st-century eyes to go back to the Bible's first-century world and understand all the contours of what Paul is saying. Slaves in the ancient world had no social standing, no legal family, no inheritance, and no personhood. And so when Paul calls Christians to mutual submission, he's giving them a new family, an inheritance, personhood, and social standing within the Christian community.

So, what does this mean for us? Paul wants to be sure in all of our relationships that we act like Christ. We submit ourselves to one another in ways that look like service and love. I knew a guy who was a high-level manager at a company in town. He was talking to me once about the struggle he had with his employees as a Christian manager. His employees didn't want to listen to him because of his Christian values, and he was lamenting the dissipating influence of Christianity in the world. As he was talking about his employees, he began to berate them, gossip about them, and tell stories about him yelling at them. When lunch was over, we walked back to the parking lot, where I saw a sticker on his car that, in big bold letters, quoted "John 13:34-35: 'Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will now that you are my disciples." I have to wonder if he saw the disconnect.

As a manager, he saw his position as wielding power and influence over them, not one of mutual submission. In all our relationships, we ought to begin first and foremost with our love of the other person. Treat our spouses, our children, our co-workers, our neighbors, and even our enemies with the same love Jesus has for us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Paul tells us to "render service with enthusiasm." What things in our life feel mundane and above us that we could do with more enthusiasm and joy?
2. Who is a person in your life you know you should treat with more mutuality?

Week 6, Day 3

Ephesians 6:10-13

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; 11 put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, 12 for our[e] struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present[f] darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.[g] 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm.

Understanding the Passage:

Let me tell you about my enemy. They are obnoxious; they think themselves better than they are; they are pretentious; they always seem to have things break their way; they've played dirty; they even seem to have the refs in their pocket. They are the Green Bay Packers. Maybe you have an enemy?

As Paul moves to his concluding thought in his letter to Ephesus, he wants to remind everyone once again of the challenging enemies they face. But, unlike the Packers, for Paul our enemies are not human. They aren't this nation over here, that tribe down the road, or this sports team we really don't like. But, they are spiritual. And since they are spiritual enemies, their influence can be more subtle in our life. But, in the same kind of way as an enemy nation, they can still rob us of our peace, our wellbeing, and even our life if we aren't careful.

Similarly, we can face these kinds of forces today. The enemy of anger is one. There's nothing wrong when we feel anger, it's a good and normal emotion. However, when we leave anger to fester, it, like an enemy, can take ahold of our life. I knew someone at a previous church whose life had been overtaken by anger. A bitter divorce that happened 36 years before was still coloring their world in 2026. They were the kind of person where nobody could do anything the right way, everyone else was wrong but them. The enemy had overtaken them. Many of us know someone whose story is like this.

There are other enemies that can dominate our life: busyness, apathy, competition, fear, and many more. Paul wants to make sure we put on the right armor, that we take the right preparations to we can stand firm.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What enemies do you feel like are currently weighing you down?
2. What might help you feel like you are standing firm?
3. What makes old wounds so hard to let go of? What would it look like to "put down" a long-held anger?

Week 6, Day 4

Ephesians 6:14-17
14 Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness 15 and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these,[a] take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Understanding the Passage:
If you grew up in and around the church, you may know this passage. The armor of God is a classic Sunday school lesson that invites all parts of us to be ready. But what we may have missed in Sunday school is the deep wells Paul draws from to give us this image.

It begins with the belt, which for the Roman soldier was the symbol of readiness. Just as a player puts on their helmet just before running out to the field, the belt was that sign that a soldier was ready to go. Paul wants us to be ready!

Next, you have the Breastplate of Righteousness and the Helmet of Salvation. Both refer to Isaiah 59:17. In this passage, the prophet describes God putting on these things when God looks around and sees that nobody is righting the wrongs of the world. Hearers of this passage would have understood Paul's reference and the reminder that righteousness and salvation are things we put on not for our sake, but for the sake of others. Similarly, our shoes help us towards our goal of making peace with one another.

Then lastly, we have our sword and our shield. Paul describes this large quadrangular shield, designed by the Romans, which was particularly good at stopping the enemy's flaming arrows. Paul, when speaking of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, blends both a military idiom and a reference to Isaiah 11:4 to say that, as Christians, we are protected against the harms of the day.

Not only does Paul's message call to mind the Old Testament, but Greek-speaking hearers would have also seen this as a reference to the *Iliad,* where just as Achilles' armor was fashioned by the Greek Gods, so too do Christians have protection given to us by the one true God.

What's the purpose of all this armor? It's to be ready for our enemies! As we talked about yesterday, there are all kinds of spiritual enemies that, if we are not careful, will undo us. For Paul, through the right spiritual habits, it will be like putting on armor. It doesn't prevent the challenges from coming, but it changes how they affect us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:
1. What armor of the world are you wearing that feels like it doesn't fight right?
2. What spiritual practices in your life help you feel like you're putting your armor on? What spiritual practices feel like they are missing from your life?
3. Think of a time in your life where you faced challenges, but felt comfortable and confident in your ability to face them? What was true about your life in that time?

Week 6, Day 5

Ephesians 6:18-24
18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak a message may be

given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel [20] *for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.* [21] *So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord.* [22] *I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are and to encourage your hearts.* [23] *Peace be to the brothers and sisters and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* [24] *Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Understanding the Passage:
"Keep Alert" these were the words given to me by Scotty, the Pastor to Jr. High students at the church I grew up in. I had just been given an exciting new responsibility. He wanted me to run the slides for our Jr. High-Aged Worship. At first, I was excited and nervous about this new responsibility. However, the newness quickly wore off; I realized it wasn't the most thrilling job. I just pressed the right arrow key every time he hit the third-to-last word in the song. After a couple of months, I got so confident in my right-arrow clicking that I started playing Minesweeper while doing the slides. Until one Sunday, I got so drawn in by the game that I forgot to change the slides. The slides were still in the first verse while the song had long finished the chorus, when suddenly worship for these 100 kids abruptly stopped. And Scottie shouted to me, "Chris, you okay back there?" I shouted back about some made-up computer trouble, and we moved on. After all these years, I've yet to tell him the truth and figured I could confess somewhere safe, like the last day of a devotional.

Paul, like Scotty to me, calls us to be ready. Paul throughout Ephesians has outlined all kinds of temptations, but the temptation of distraction isn't something dastardly or outright evil; it's numbness, it's apathy, it's comfort. It's that little voice in your head that tells you, 'these slides are boring, you can in fact, play Minesweeper while doing them'. And it pulls away just enough of your attention to distract and take away from others.

We face all kinds of distractions in our day, and I'd argue that some of these can do more damage to our life than we realize. It's the distraction of looking at my phone versus being present with my family. It's the distraction of lying in my bed binge-watching TV rather than catching up with an old friend. It's the distraction of another kid's sports tournament rather than being together for worship as a family. And while none of these things are bad, in fact, some of them are good. I love the camaraderie and community of my daughter's t-ball league. They can, however, drain us of something more valuable.

And so, we need to heed Paul's words and keep alert.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:
1. What distracts you from staying spiritually alert?
2. Where does apathy creep in in your life?
3. What things seem good on the surface, but are really draining more of your life than you realize? If you can't think of anything immediately, take time to be aware of the impact on you and your family.

Video Discussion Questions:

1. When was a time that learning more about a passage of scripture completely changed how you understood it?
2. How do you approach the challenging passages in Scripture, especially ones that feel like they are from a wholly different culture?
3. Dr. Pace emphasized how important Mutual Submission is to understanding this part of Ephesians. Do you see mutual submission at play in your life? How could it change your relationships with your kids or grandkids (vv.1-4) or with other people (vv. 5-9)?
4. In baptism, we commit to raising our new son, daughter, brother, sister in the faith. Where have you really lived out that commitment?
5. Think of a person in authority who treated you more like an equal than a subordinate. What was that like? How did it affect you? How could more of those characteristics show up in your life and relationships?
6. Paul's closing words are a bit like a motivational speech for the church in Ephesus. What have been some of the most inspiring words you've heard from a devotional, sermon, book, song, or other source for your own faith?
7. What was your biggest takeaway this week? What was your biggest takeaway in this study as a whole?

Prayer requests and other notes: