

12. Ephesians 6:1-24



Ephesians 6:1-3

3. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' – this is the first commandment with a promise: 'so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.' (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Paul moves from the relationship between husband and wife to the relationship between parents and children.

The key, as in the previous section, is found in the simple, but all-embracing and revolutionary words: 'in the Lord'. The context in which obedience is to be given is that of the whole letter.

In the light of Paul's teaching elsewhere concerning the promises of God and their fulfilment in Jesus and so in the Christian community, we should understand his reference to the 'promise' as including all the riches of the Christian life mentioned in the first three chapters.

Ephesians 6:4

4. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Because of the traditional authority structure in the home, the exhortation to parents is directed more particularly to fathers. The word translated here ‘bring them up’ (ἐκτρέφω), is the same word that Paul used earlier when speaking of a husband ‘nourishing’ his body (5:29). It is the father’s duty to provide intellectual and moral nourishment for his children, especially such as is ‘of the Lord’.

Through obedience to Christian parents, a child will learn of the Lord and learn also how to respond in faith to what God has revealed in Christ.

Ephesians 6:5-8

5. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey the Messiah; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of the Messiah, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

Domestic slavery was so much part of daily life in Paul's world that he can exhort us to be like him in being a slave of God (1 Thessalonians 1:9), of the Messiah (Galatians 1:10; Romans 1:1; Colossians 1:7; Philippians 1:1), and of one another (Galatians 5:13). Important insights into Paul's attitude towards institutional slavery can be found in his letter to Philemon.

Though Paul does not question the existence of slavery in this passage, baptism into the Christian community has introduced into this institution, as into the institution of marriage, a principle that transcends it, and that would necessarily transform it – the principle stated by Paul in his letter to the Colossians: ‘there is no longer slave and free; but the Messiah is all and in all!’ (Colossians 3:11).

Conversion to Jesus involves a conversion of attitude on every level, including the level of social institutions. Because the only institutional change that is sustainable must grow out of personal conversion, Paul continues to focus on personal change and on building up a community of love.

Paul exhorts slaves to have only one thing in mind: pleasing their real Lord, the Messiah (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Colossians 3:24).

Jesus is the perfect model for a slave (Philippians 2:7)

Ephesians 6:9

6. Masters, do the same to your slaves. Do not threaten them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Paul reminds the masters (κύριοι, 'lords') that both they and their slaves have the same Lord to whom they are answerable, and that masters will not receive privileged treatment. Recall what he has already said about us all being adopted children of God (1:5), and therefore brothers and sisters.

We might recall here Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. If you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity. In any case, whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of the Messiah. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God' (1 Corinthians 7:21-24).

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power [1:19; 3:16]. Put on the whole armour of God [‘put on the Messiah’, 4:24], so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil [2:2]. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day [5:16], and having done everything, to stand firm.

We cannot live ‘in the Messiah’ by our own strength. Paul concludes his exhortations by highlighting the strength of the powers of darkness that are determined to get us to turn back to the way of life which we lived before our conversion to Christ. We need to be strong, and we can be if we live ‘**in the Lord**’ and ‘**in the strength of *his* power**’.

We recall Paul's prayer that we know 'what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power' (1:19), and that the Father 'may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit' (3:16).

Paul has already said that to experience his strength we must clothe ourselves in Jesus 'with the new self, created according to the likeness of God' (4:24). Here, because he wishes to stress the strength of the enemy, he speaks in terms taken from the battle field. Our enemy is wily. We recall Paul's earlier warning: 'We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming'(4:14). We recall also his earlier reminder: 'once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light' (5:14).

Paul speaks of the **'devil'**, referred to earlier as **'the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient'** (2:2). He speaks, too, of the super-terrestrial powers of darkness, whatever they be, who are ranged against us. We will need **'the whole armour of God'** to be able to **'withstand on that evil day'**.

What the psalmist refers to as **'the day of trouble'** (see Psalm 41:1; 49:5; 94:13), is already with us. As Paul has already said: **'the days are evil'** (5:16).

We need not fear the spiritual battle in which we are constantly engaged, for we have **'the whole armour of God'** (6:13)

The armour is not merely defensive, for, as Paul says to the Corinthians: **'the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds'** (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Ephesians 6:14

Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth [1-3] around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness [God's righteousness].

We must clothe ourselves in righteousness. Paul is thinking in the first place of God's righteousness. Isaiah speaks of God 'putting on righteousness as a breastplate' (Isaiah 59:17). In Jesus we are given a share in the righteousness of God as we are clothed 'with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in the righteousness and respect for the sacred which come from the truth' (4:24).

Ephesians 6:15-16

As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Earlier, Paul insisted that we not only live as children of light, but that we expose ‘**the unfruitful works of darkness**’ (5:11). Similarly here, we are to be ‘**ready to proclaim the gospel of peace**’. Paul is borrowing from Isaiah: ‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news’ (Isaiah 52:7). As Paul wrote earlier: ‘**The Messiah is our peace**’ (2:14; see 2:14-18).

Our main defence must be our ‘**faith**’, for it is ‘**through faith**’ that ‘**the Messiah dwells in our hearts**’ (3:17), and it is ‘**by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God**’ (2:18).

Ephesians 6:17

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

Isaiah speaks of the ‘**helmet of salvation**’ (Isaiah 59:17), an image already used by Paul in his correspondence with the Thessalonians: ‘Let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation’ (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Paul concludes with the assurance that the Holy Spirit himself is with us. We have nothing to fear from the powers of darkness: ‘with the breath [‘Spirit’] of his lips he shall kill the wicked’ (Isaiah 11:4). We might ask how we are to get all this armour. Paul’s answer comes immediately in the following verses.

Ephesians 6:18

praying in the Spirit [compare Colossians 4:2] at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

This verse begins with a participle which links what is said here with the previous verse: 'Take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God'. In fact it is basic to all that Paul has said about our needing to be clothed in 'the whole armour of God' (6:13). This is not something which we can do by our own will. It is all grace. Certainly we can be assured that it is a grace which God offers unconditionally. But it is a grace offered in love. If the grace is to be received, our hearts must be open to welcome it, and it is here that prayer plays an essential part. Paul exhorted the Colossians in a similar way: 'Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving' (Colossians 4:2).

Ephesians 6:18

praying 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.

Notice the stress on **'all'**. We are to engage in all sorts of prayer; praise and thanksgiving have featured strongly in this letter. Here Paul puts the accent on 'supplication'. We are to pray at all times. We are to persevere in prayer in all circumstances, and we are to pray for all the saints. Luke tells us of a parable of Jesus 'about their need to pray always and not to lose heart' (Luke 18:1). We recall the words of Jesus telling us to 'be alert at all times, praying' (Luke 21:36).

Ephesians 6:18

praying 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.

Our prayer, like everything else in the Christian life, is not something that we do from our own resources. We are to ‘pray in the Spirit’, for it is in the Spirit that we experience communion with Christ and through him with the Father. It is in prayer that the church achieves its goal of being ‘to the praise of his glory’ (1:14)

Paul’s words to the Romans are especially pertinent: ‘The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God’ (Romans 8:26-27).

Ephesians 6:19-20

Pray also for me (compare Colossians 4:3-4), so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

As frequently in his letters, Paul asks for prayers for himself that he will be open to receive the grace ‘to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel’. In this way he returns to the main theme of his letter: the wonderful design of the Father to bring everyone into communion with his Son in the Spirit, by drawing them all, Jews and Gentiles together, into ‘the church, the body of the Messiah, the fullness of him who fills all in all’ (1:23).

Ephesians 6:21-22

So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, **Tychicus** (see Colossians 4:7-8, 16) **will tell you everything.** He is a dear brother and a faithful minister [διάκονος] in the Lord. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage [παρακαλέω] **your hearts.**

‘Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts’ (Colossians 4:7-8).

Luke tells us that Tychicus was from Asia (Acts 20:4). He also tells us that Tychicus accompanied Paul from Corinth to Judea, so Paul could have used him, once again, to convey this letter from Caesarea. One ancient manuscript names Tychicus as the scribe used in the writing of Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:23

²³Peace [2:14-18; 4:3; 6:15] be to the whole community, and love with faith, [3:17] from God the Father and Jesus, our Lord and Messiah.

Peace is an important theme of the letter. Besides Paul's developed treatment of these theme in 2:14-18 in which he identifies Jesus as 'our peace', we recall his prayer that they keep on 'making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (4:3), as well as the importance of their doing everything necessary to be 'ready to proclaim the gospel of peace' (6:15).

Paul prays also for 'love with faith'. The letter has focused on 'God, who is rich in mercy' and on what God has done 'out of the great love with which he loved us' (2:4), through Jesus, 'the Beloved' (1:6), who 'loved us and gave himself up for us' (5:2). This love is welcomed in faith. We recall Paul's prayer that 'the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love' (3:17).

Ephesians 6:24

Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

In his blessing Paul also picks up the theme of ‘**grace**’. The opening hymn sang of ‘**the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved**’ (1:6), and of ‘**the riches of his grace**’ (1:7). Paul declared: ‘**by grace you have been saved**’ (2:5), and spoke of the ‘**immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**’ (2:7). He spoke, too, of the grace which each of them has received ‘**according to the measure of the Messiah’s gift**’ (4:7).

Ephesians 6:24

Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

Paul's final words are remarkable. Though the reality permeates everything Paul writes, it may surprise the reader to hear that this is the only text in all his letters in which Paul uses 'love' [ἀγαπάω] to describe our response to Jesus. In this time of faith we are to live in communion with Christ and by his Spirit. We are to long for complete communion with him. Living his life we are to love those around us with his love. But it seems that, for Paul, loving Jesus is more properly said of the communion when 'we see face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Ephesians 6:24

Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks of 'undying love'. Perhaps, in view of this being his farewell to the Gentile communities of the east before he leaves for Rome and the west, Paul speaks of their love as 'undying' because he is thinking of eternity and our undying communion with Jesus when we are raised into glory with an immortal body like his. Perhaps he is thinking of Jesus now living in this state, untouched by death, and he is reflecting on the truth that Christian love, even now, causes us to transcend death, because it is our share in the resurrected life.

If Paul is indeed writing from prison in Caesarea, and if this letter is intended as a summary of his gospel and as a final gift to the Gentile Christians in the east, it could have no more fitting conclusion.

We are frequently conscious when reading Paul of his passionate concern for the unity and the catholicity of the Christian community, but nowhere else does he argue the case for both so compellingly. Nowhere else are we as aware of Paul the teacher insisting on the importance of knowing that a church, rich in diversity and all-embracing in its love, is at the heart of God's eternal design for the human race. If it was his imprisonment that gave him the space, and if it was the thought of leaving his missions in the east that gave him the motivation, and if it was the freedom from controversy or the need to attend to the questions and problems of a particular church that gave him the opportunity to reflect upon and share this conviction, we can only thank God's providence. For what we have in the extraordinary power, clarity and beauty of this letter is a most precious gift from the brilliant mind and most loving heart of this faithful apostle of Christ.