

Study 8: Chapter 6

Introduction

We are in the midst of a war between Satan and God, and get caught in the cross-fire. Satan tempts us with “the sins of the flesh” to draw us away from God, and our eternal security. The temptations that we suffer are the tools that Satan uses.

Paul tells us about our tools for the battle, and how to prepare ourselves. Apostasy is coming. The message is: “hang in there”.

Body of the Study

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Family Relationships

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Reflect on the qualities that your parents exhibited (both good and bad). How have these qualities influenced your personal life? Which ones have you followed, and which ones have you tried to avoid?

How have these things influenced your relationship with God?

How does the description of the spiritual warfare and the armour enable us to prepare? Do we depend on ourselves, or on the power of God?

Read 1st & 2nd Timothy – What is happening in the church in Ephesus at this time?

Notes for study 8: Ephesians Chapter 6

We are in the midst of a war between Satan and God, and get caught in the cross-fire. Satan tempts us with “the sins of the flesh” to draw us away from God, and our eternal security. The temptations that we suffer are the tools that Satan uses.

We face similar apostasy attacks today, just like the Ephesian church in the first century. Satan’s most successful attacks against the church usually come from the inside. Often these come from leaders within the church (Acts 20:30). Many people search the Scriptures merely to find arguments to sustain their doctrinal positions. Then there are those who read their Bibles just in order to point out what is wrong with the church. But the Bible was written that we might be in contact with the eternal God, our creator, through His Son Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us about our tools for the battle, and how to prepare ourselves. Apostasy is coming. The message is: “hang in there”.

Family Relationships

Paul gives some practical instructions to everyone, whether children, parents, husbands, wives, slaves, or masters. He follows from the considerable discussion on husbands and wives in the last chapter, and now addresses children “... *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ² *"Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise--* ³ *"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"...*” (6:1-3 NIV). The letter addresses the entire family of God – the church – of which children and parents are participants.

Obedience by children consists in listening to the advice given by parents, an obligation supported by many passages in both OT and NT. In Col 3:20, Paul adds that this obedience is to be comprehensive in its scope. Isaac's willingness to be offered as a sacrifice is a model of such submission. Disobedience to parents is a symptom of a disintegrating social structure (cf. 2Ti 3:2), and Christian families have a responsibility not to contribute to the collapse of an ordered community. Both parents are mentioned, though in v. 4 only fathers are given instructions as to reciprocal behavior. As head of the family, the husband acts representatively for his wife (as mother) as well as on his own behalf. (NIVBC).

The instruction to children is to obey their parents *in the Lord*. This is to be Christ-like in our instruction (from parents), and in our submission and obedience (as children), rather than setting limits for obedience. The instruction is from the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12). Weed notes¹:

The admonition for children to obey your parents is grounded in the fact that this relationship is ordained by God (for this is right). For Paul, disobedience to parents is one of several signs of alienation from God and the consequent fragmentation of society (cf. Rom. 1:30, 2 Tim. 3:2). In the Lord ... indicates the manner, not the limits of Christian obedience to parents. The instruction here is not that Christian children are to obey only Christian parents nor even that children are to obey their parents only insofar as parental wishes are commensurate with Christian action. The writer here is addressing families assumed to be Christian, showing that parental obedience, ordained by God, is heightened rather than weakened by one's relationship to Christ. Nonetheless, the injunction is reinforced with Old Testament quotations (cf. Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) familiar to Jewish readers, promising longevity and well-being to those who comply with divine will.

The instruction *this is the first commandment with promise* is of some confusion, because it is not the first commandment (it is the fifth), nor is the first one that contains a promise – the second commandment also contains one.

It seems most likely that "first" here means first in importance. The rabbis regarded this commandment as the weightiest of all. Perhaps Paul meant to convey the fact that this is the

¹ Weed, p.182-183

most important commandment for children. Another likely explanation is to note the absence of the article before "first," suggesting that this is a primary commandment, i.e., one of foremost significance. (NIVBC).

The next instruction is for parents, although most translations use the specific *fathers*. Weed notes²:

...the plural *pateres* may better be rendered "parents" as in the Jerusalem Bible...

The context shows that the instruction is not limited to fathers to the exclusion of mothers, but rather to those in the family who give instruction to children. "...*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord...*" (6:4 NIV). It is clearly possible for parents to over-control their children to the point where the children are afraid to do anything, and get into trouble for everything. The parent-child relationship is not a one-way street, and there are equally obligations on the parents as there are to the children. Parents have the responsibility to bring their children up to respect God (in the training and instruction of the Lord), whilst children have the responsibility to mould themselves to their parent's instruction.

Employer Relationships

Although the specific instruction is to *masters and slaves*, the direct application can be made to employers and employees. In the New Testament times, slavery was common. God does not condemn slavery, but the NT instruction creates an environment that makes it difficult to prosper. "...*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ...*" (6:5 NIV). This first instruction is for those in the subordinate relationship. It is most common in the workforce to regard employers (bosses) with disdain, and to try to do the minimum that you can get away with. As Christians, we should show proper respect to our employers just as we would serve the Lord. We need to be honest in our working relationships, and remember that God watches over us. We are His representatives on earth, and we need to let Him shine through in our lives as we go about our secular work "...*Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.*"⁷ *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,*⁸ *because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free...*" (6:6-8 NIV). Unlike paid workers, slaves had nothing (or little) to gain by their work. However, they were still to serve their masters as if serving God. In this way, they can have a very positive influence on their masters (as we can on our employers), and we may very well have the opportunity to convert them to Christ.

The second instructions are not for those in subordinate positions, but for those in positions of authority "...*And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him...*" (6:9 NIV). The message is specifically addressed to Christian masters/employers (of course – since the letter is addressed to the church, it is unlikely that the general community would want to know or practice it, and since they are under the leadership of Satan and not God, they are not bound by it). Christians in positions of authority need to remember that we have an all-knowing and all-watching God seeing over how we treat others – *our Master is in heaven*.

It would be difficult for the traditional master-slave relationship to continue in such an environment, where the masters treated their subordinates the way that the Lord treated us (remember that we are subject to Him, and He came and gave His life for us – the life of a servant. He came to serve, not to be served Mt 20:28). Masters and slaves (and employers and employees) are all on an equal footing in the church. There is no subordinate hierarchy – we are all brothers and sisters – and all have God as our Father.

² Weed, p.183

Prepare for the Battle

We have discussed the spiritual warfare between God and Satan. The instructions in chapter 5 to live a pure life is an important way to ensure that we do not fall into Satan's snare. But, the temptations will come, and we must be strong in the face of them "...*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power...*" (6:10 NIV). The war was won at Calvary, and we fight *from* victory, but we need to ensure that we don't get torn away by Satan. "...*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes...*" (6:11 NIV). Like the well-equipped Roman soldier, we must prepare ourselves. But the battle is spiritual, not physical "...*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms...*" (6:12 NIV). Paul tells us about the tools and protection that we need to fight the battle. Notice that *rulers and authorities* are included in our enemies. That is not to say that all rulers and authorities are opposed to God – in fact, God allowed them to be put in place (Jn 19:11). The Roman Empire dominated the (then known) world, and soon it would rise against Christians and persecute them [for a further discussion on this, see my Revelation study – especially the introduction study]. The rise of the first wave of persecution under Nero was only about 5 years away (from the time of writing). Satan used the persecution under the Roman Empire (especially the demand for emperor worship) in an attempt to fight against God, and overcome the church. The battle continued for about 250 years until Constantine ordered religious tolerance around AD 312. Although a great rise of persecution occurred under the Roman Empire, we must not think that the problem was confined to the first or second centuries. Satan is still active in the world and will use whatever power he is allowed to have and use to draw us away from God.

The Christian's Armour

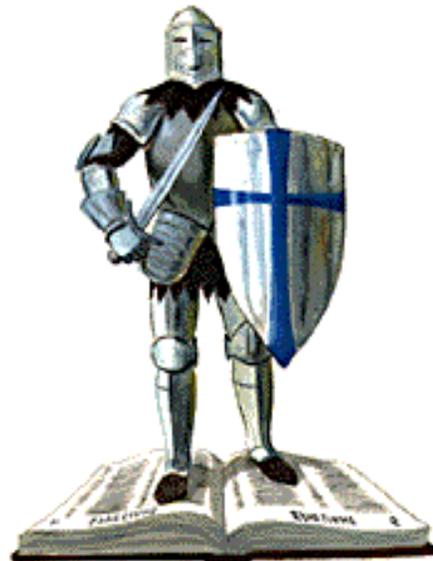
We are called to put on God's armour "...*Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand...*" (6:13 NIV). The armour comes in two groups of three:

- Truth, Righteousness, The Gospel;
- Faith, Salvation, The Word of God.

"...*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...*" (6:14 NIV). As they prepared for battle, the Roman Soldiers would first put on their girdle or belt. The girdle protected the mid to lower abdominal area. It was the one item to which other items were attached – **truth holds the other parts of the armour together!** With the truth holding our armour together, we can face the enemy with confidence, with a clear conscience, and without fear!

Jesus said "And ye shall know the *truth*, and the *truth* shall make you **free**." (Jn 8:32) and, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." **Jesus is the truth.** Jesus holds all of our armour together!

"...*with the breastplate of righteousness in place...*" (6:14 NIV). The Soldier's breastplate protected the heart. It would have been made from metal plates or chains, and would have covered the body from the neck to the waist, both front and back. Just as our heart is the one key organ responsible for sending blood through our circulatory system to keep us alive, our spiritual lives are dead if our hearts are not right with God!



The breastplate symbolises righteousness. Satan is our accuser. He cannot accuse us if we are living Godly lives. As Christians, we have been “made right” by the blood of Christ! His blood cleanses us from all sin, and makes us “right” in God’s sight. Paul says that this righteousness (being “made right”) protects our hearts against the attacks of Satan and his helpers.

Paul reminds us in Romans that “...*there is none righteous, no not one...*” – except Jesus! **He is our breastplate**, and protects our heart.

“...and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace...” (6:15 NIV). Historians credit the Roman Army’s footwear as one of the greatest reasons it was so powerful. The Roman Soldier was equipped with footwear with spiked soles, providing them a strong and balanced stance giving them superiority in battle, particularly on hills and uneven ground. The stance is the most important move in martial arts, and is practiced first. From it all manners of kicks and punches are launched! Perhaps more importantly, his shoes allowed the Roman Soldier to walk many miles in preparation for the battle.

Paul talks to the Ephesians about our **walk** with God. “...*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them...*” (2:10 NKJV). “...*I, therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling which you were called...*” (4:1 NKJV). “...*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind...*” (4:17 NKJV). John also exhorts us to walk a worthy life “...*If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin...*” (1 Jn 1:6-7 NIV).

Paul expects us to wear the armour that will help us in our **walk** with God, and also help us **stand our ground!** The gospel is about Jesus Christ, and what he has done in reclaiming us to God. To have our feet fitted with the readiness of the Gospel, means to stand on our relationship with Jesus!

“...In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one...” (6:16 NIV) The Roman Soldier was equipped with a large shield – 0.6m x 1.2m – usually made from wood and covered with tough leather. It effectively deflected arrows, spears, and “fiery darts”. Some historians have indicated that these were full-length body shields.

Faith provides the evidence (assurance) of things not seen (Heb 11:1). Our vision comes from our faith in God, and we don’t need to physically see them in order to believe the things of God. But that is not to say that we have *blind faith*. Our faith is based on evidence, especially the accounts of credible eye-witnesses.

Faith is a defensive weapon that enables us to deflect the attacks against us. Satan shoots fiery darts towards us in the form of evil and hateful thoughts, doubts, burning desires towards sinful actions. We need to “quench them” lest they light a fire within us and cause us to disobey God. We must always walk by faith, and be ever ready for the unexpected attacks that come upon us, having our “shield of faith” ever ready.

Our faith is in God, and in Jesus as His Son! **Jesus protects us from all the attacks of Satan!**

“...Take the helmet of salvation...” (6:17 NIV). The Roman Soldier wore a helmet to protect his head. Helmets have been a part of armour, whether they be Roman Gladiator, Samurai, Persian, Ottoman, or Conquistador. A well-designed helmet will protect the Soldier from various angles of attack. The head is where our mind is, and the greatest battlefield is the one in our minds, the area that the enemy wants to attack the most.

Paul says: *wear Jesus Christ in your minds for protection*. Other Scriptures say:

- "...*For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?*" *But we have the mind of Christ...*" (1 Cor 2:16 NIV)
- "...*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" (Php 2:5 NKJ)
- "...*Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...*" (1 Pet 4:1 NKJ)

The helmet protects the head. A person wounded in the head is out of the battle. Satan has deceived many with false ideas about God. Satan also wants to damage our assurance of salvation. Many Christians have been deceived into thinking that they committed the unpardonable sin and have lost their salvation. Be encouraged, those who commit the unpardonable sin have no desire to return to God.

The Hebrew name Joshua (Yeshua) means "Salvation". "Jesus" is a variant of that name. **Jesus Christ is Salvation!!**

"...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (6:17 NIV) All of the other armour is defensive. This one is the only offensive weapon that the Christian has. *"...For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart..."* (HEB 4:12 NIV)

The best steel for swords is an almost-pure high carbon steel. In our century, we have more alloys than you can imagine. There are many replica or fake swords that use *stainless steel*. They look nice, but are no substitute for the pure thing. In a spiritual sense, we must make sure we have the pure Word of God, and not a compromise of it, nor a *mixture* that might compromise our sword!

The pure word subdues and mortifies evil desires and thoughts as they rise within; and answers error and unbelief as they attack from the outside. A single text from the word of God, well understood, and rightly applied, can immediately destroy temptation, false doctrines, and objections, and conquer the most formidable adversary.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He responded by quoting His Father's words and spoke them with *authority*. Each Word became a sword-blow to Satan's head! Finally, note John's introduction of Jesus *"...In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..."* (Jn 1:1) **Jesus is the Word of God!**

"...And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints..." (6:18 NIV) These pieces of armour are undergirded with **PRAYER**. The Battle is The Lord's. Too often we think that **we** are the ones who have the Power. We need to commit ourselves to God, and ask for His help in dealing with the battle! As David was about to face Goliath, he said *"...Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands..."* (1 Sam 17:47 NKJ)

Prayer Requests

Paul recognises his own dependency on God, and requests prayers from the Ephesians *"...Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should..."* (6:19-20 NIV). Paul notes that he is *an ambassador in chains* which relates to his physical constraint under house arrest in Rome, and also that he is bonded to the Lord. We can all relate to Paul's feelings as he faces some trepidation in presenting the gospel. Paul had preached to Kings (Acts 9:15; 26:19), and whilst in Rome, had the opportunity to preach the gospel to Caesar (Php 4:22). His prayer request is that he might be given the right words to say whenever he opens his mouth to speak (the gospel).

Closing Remarks

From the closing remarks, we can see some similarities between the Ephesian letter and the Colossian letter. "...Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing.²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you..." (6:21-22 NIV). Both letters were written whilst Paul was imprisoned (3:1, 4:1, 6:20; Col 4:3, 18). In both cases, Tychicus was sent with the letter with news of Paul's circumstances (cf. Col 4:7).

The letter closes with a typical greeting from Paul "...Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love..." (6:23-34 NIV).

Ephesians finishes with a truly apostolic benediction, but one different in form from others in Paul's writings. Couched in the third person, not in the second, it has two parts instead of one. "Grace," which usually comes first, stands last. The three blessings that figure most prominently throughout Ephesians--peace, love, and faith--occupy the first half of the benediction. This is more than a farewell greeting; it is a prayer for reconciliation. Paul longs to see the whole brotherhood of believers in Ephesus and its environs--Jews and Gentiles alike--at "peace" with each other in the one body of Christ (3:15, 19; 4:3). This will only be brought about through mutual "love" (1:15; 3:17-18; 4:2, 16) combined with "faith," from which it is derived (1:15; 3:17; Gal 5:6). The ultimate source of these three essential features of Christian community life is God himself. The name of Christ the Son is associated with that of God the Father in perfect equality.

This letter began with an ascription of praise "to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (1:3). On this interpretation, it ends with a benediction invoking God's grace on all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption, because they are sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (1:13-14; 4:30). (NIVBC).