

LIVE BY DESIGN

STUDY GUIDE

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Many thanks to Sue Applewhite for volunteering her time and talent to proof this study.

Questions? Comments?

If your use of this Study Guide leads to questions about the Bible or theology, e-mail us at:

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Comments and questions are welcome. We'd love to hear from you!

Abbreviations for Bible Translations

NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version (2011)
ESV	English Standard Version
CEB	Common English Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version

Abbreviations for Other References

BDAG-3

W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Revised and edited by F. W. Danker, trans. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

L&N

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1988).

NIDNTT

Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Abridged Edition)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

ANLEX

Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

HALOT

L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1994–2000).

TWOT

R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980).

Recommended Commentary

While many valuable commentaries have been written on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, there is one that stands above the others for its usefulness to the members of Christ Fellowship. This commentary is not only strong in theology, but it discusses practical application of the biblical text in a skillful way. It is our pleasure to recommend this commentary for your purchase and use. Because Ephesians covers so much basic theology, this commentary can help you not only during the three series of sermons on the book but in the future as well.

Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

To easily find this book on Amazon's website, just search for its ISBN-13 number in the Amazon search box:
978-0-310-49340-2

The book is available from Amazon in both hardcover and Kindle versions.

A brief introduction to Ephesians

Barry Applewhite, author

To understand any book of the Bible, it is helpful to understand who wrote it and the context in which it was written. This introduction *briefly* surveys these issues as well as the theological themes advanced by the author and the literary structure of the book.

Paul, the zealot-scholar who became an apostle

I have no hesitation in naming the Apostle Paul as the author of Ephesians. As the *ESV Study Bible* wryly notes, “Pauline authorship of Ephesians was universally accepted until modern times.”

Paul was born with the name Saul in the city of Tarsus (Acts 22:3) during the first decade of the first century. He was a Roman citizen by birth and was raised in Jerusalem by his Jewish parents. Trained by Rabbi Gamaliel, a renowned scholar, Saul became a Pharisee and took a leading role in the persecution of those following Jesus. Other biographical details may be found in Philippians 3:4–6.

In about A.D. 35, while on a mission to persecute believers in Damascus, Saul encountered Christ during a blinding experience and surrendered to him (Acts 9). Jesus declared that Saul would be his emissary to Jews and Gentiles alike. While witnessing in Cyprus, Saul began using his other name: Paul (Acts 13:9).

During the period A.D. 53–56, Paul spent almost three years teaching in Ephesus. In about A.D. 62, while he was incarcerated in Rome during his appeal to Caesar, Paul wrote the letter we call Ephesians to the believers in the Ephesus region. Whatever happened with that appeal, Paul was eventually executed during the persecution under Emperor Nero about A.D. 67. It is fair to say that Paul of Tarsus was the most influential evangelist in all of history.

Historical context of Ephesians

Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected in A.D. 33. Shortly after his resurrection, the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit (during the feast of Pentecost) and began to spread the good news about Jesus to other nations and peoples.

When Paul was teaching in Ephesus about 20 years after Christ’s crucifixion, the city had a population of around 250,000 (the size of Plano, Texas), probably making it the fourth largest city in the world.¹ It was firmly under Roman control.

Sitting on what is now the southwest coast of modern Turkey, the city was a thriving trade center for goods going to and from Corinth and Rome. Archaeologists have uncovered a library, a theater (seating 24,000), brothels, a market, temples, a stadium, public baths, city walls, and streets paved with stone.

Ephesus hosted the great temple of Artemis, a widespread, virgin-huntress religion in Asia Minor. Aside from various mystery religions, Ephesus also held the Temple of the Divine Julius [Caesar] and the goddess Roma. Magic was also a common element of the religious scene. Such religious diversity was normal in major Roman cities in the first century.

1 “Ephesus,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

The Book of Ephesians as literature

In literary form, Ephesians resembles the other personal letters contained in the New Testament. Such letters are often identified by the term “epistle.” This particular letter falls roughly into three parts: instruction (1:3–3:21), exhortation to action (4:1–6:20), and commendation (6:21–22). Since Paul deals in Ephesians 4:1-5:20 with how to carry out our new identity in Christ, this biblical text has strategic importance for reaching maturity in Christ.

The theological themes of Ephesians

In presenting the theological themes of Ephesians, we will follow the analysis of New Testament scholar Harold Hoehner. He finds that love is the dominant theme of Ephesians, including “both God’s love for people and the believer’s love for one another within the new community.”² Next in importance is the companion theme of unity among believers. In fact, unity receives more attention in Ephesians 4 than love.

A discussion of the theology of Ephesians is beyond the scope of this introduction. The book of Ephesians covers the Trinity, stresses Christ (= Messiah) as the identity of Jesus, explains the actions of the Holy Spirit, and presents many themes about the assembly of believers. The concepts of our salvation and reconciliation to God also may be found.

In terms of its influence on human history, Ephesians is one of the most important documents ever written.

Commentaries on Ephesians

Technical

Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2002). Careful scholarly analysis with abundant word studies of Paul’s vocabulary. Extensive study of Paul’s authorship and the history of Ephesus.

S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2016). Assumes Paul is the author. Especially helpful on dividing the text into its rhetorical units. Careful analysis of the text, but not as strong on theology.

William J. Larkin, *Ephesians*, *Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009). Requires a knowledge of New Testament Greek, but useful for analyzing the Greek text.

Recommended

Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Insights from this master of New Testament theology are always useful. [Recommended]

“To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

(1 Timothy 1:17, ESV)

2 Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2002) 105.

Ephesus within the first-century world



Renewal in the home

Week 1 | Ephesians 6:1-4

Day 1: First looks

Barry Applewhite, author

Welcome back to the Christ Fellowship study guide for the sermon series *“Live by Design”!*

For those of you who are new to Christ Fellowship, these study guides are intended to prepare you to (1) listen to next Sunday’s sermon with greater understanding, (2) discuss with your life group how this part of God’s Word builds you toward maturity in Jesus Christ, and (3) engage with God individually (one of Christ Fellowship’s core practices).

Today’s task is to familiarize ourselves with the Bible passage for this week.

Ephesians 6:1–4

¹ 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 “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

What is the order of the people Paul speaks to?

What is it that fathers are not to do to their children?

Why should children do as Paul commands?

Day 2: Everyone starts the same way

Barry Applewhite, author

You don't have to look far at Christ Fellowship to find children — lots of children! To say that they are important is to understate the obvious.

However, while we are stating the obvious, we should not overlook the fact that the Bible contains little instruction about parenting and only a modest amount specifically addressed to children (Proverbs 1–7). Both categories combined would fill about ten pages in my *NET Bible Reader's Edition*, whose English text covers 1,398 pages.

To make matters more interesting, most first children are raised by rank amateurs! Since every child is unique, raising each one is unique as well. Sounds daunting, doesn't it? It would be more daunting except for the fact that these children are made in God's image and have brains capable of processing both spiritual information and cultural knowledge. Aside from loving them and caring for their physical needs, our task as parents chiefly turns out to be: people helping people find and follow Christ.

Ephesians 6:1

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

After considering the whole verse, do you think these “children” know right and wrong?

Commentary

The social context of Ephesians 6:1

We have some understanding of how our own culture functions in the twenty-first century, but what we need for proper biblical interpretation is a better understanding of how first-century culture worked. What were their shared assumptions? We will now turn to that question.

Ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) spent a lot of time thinking about how an ideal society should function. Aristotle decided that three relationships in the realm of the household required management *by the husband*: “master and slave, husband and wife, father and children.”³ Many other moral philosophers followed this pattern in the next few centuries. The Apostle Paul used this framework too, but he gave it a whopping Christian twist.

The Greek and Roman moralists never bothered addressing anyone other than the husband in their writings, because he was the most powerful figure in the household. What I'm saying is that no moralist before Paul

3 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2.1, sec. 1253b, lines 1-10, cited by Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 723.

had ever engaged in moral persuasion with wives, as Paul did in Ephesians 5:22. Nor had they addressed children (Ephesians 6:1-3) or — unthinkable as it was — slaves (Ephesians 6:5-8). The wives, children, and slaves who Paul treated as moral agents were members of the Christian assembly due to their shared commitment to Jesus Christ. In the language of Ephesians, they were “in Christ,” which means that they were united with Christ.

Paul faced two problems in writing to the Ephesians: (1) how to reframe their understanding of household relationships under Christ, and (2) how to keep them all from being killed due to following Christ by a highly static surrounding culture. Historian James Jeffers explains that one of the most dramatic differences between modern culture and ancient culture (such as Ephesus) was that things changed *very slowly*.⁴ We have no current experience of such a condition.

Jeffers explains why the outsiders in Ephesus would regard the Christians with suspicion: “This Jesus movement appeared to undermine the sacred and central values of the society, pulling formerly good and reliable people into a subversive cult.”⁵ First, their leader had been crucified — a common ending for a political revolutionary. Second, their message clashed with the deeply-rooted religions of the community as well as with the cult of emperor worship. Third, to get away from such public worship, the Christians had to quit participating in most of the public ceremonies held in Ephesus.⁶

Paul solved his problem in an ingenious way: he upheld the existing hierarchical order while giving the believers involved a completely new way of looking at that order. Ben Witherington describes this revision by saying, “Paul [was] trying to model household relationships on the servant-like and self-sacrificial relationship of Christ to his church.”⁷ So, outsiders saw a more reassuring picture: husbands as heads of their own wives, fathers as responsible to educate their children, and masters in charge over their slaves. Insiders, on the other hand, were learning to live out their refashioned roles by submitting to one another (Ephesians 5:21) as their expression of gratitude to Christ. These steps reduced Christian isolation but did not eliminate it. More important was the fact that each relationship had to change because of their shared relationship to Christ.

The biblical context of Ephesians 6:1

To find the right beginning for the context of Ephesians 6:1, we must go all the way back to Ephesians 5:18, which says, “And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but *be filled by the Spirit*.” (HCSB). What follows that colon after “Spirit” is a set of five Greek participles that describe the *results* of being filled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:19–21). For our current purposes, the most important of the five is found in Ephesians 5:21, which says, “submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (HCSB).

It is possible to misunderstand “submitting to one another” as some sort of mathematically precise or reciprocal exercise. Imagine that two married Christians are trying to enter a building through a door large enough for one person. How silly would it be for the two of them to remain outside because each one kept on insisting that the other one go first? Such nonsensical examples are sometimes used to discredit

4 James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1999) 249.

5 Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World*, 45.

6 Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World*, 46-7.

7 Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007) 321.

“submitting to one another” (Ephesians 5:21).

Imagine a different example: your life group holds a pot-luck dinner and you as host provide a tasty meat loaf while I bring a dish of potatoes with cheese. Five other dishes are brought by others. Mutual submission does *not* mean that if you eat my potatoes, then I am compelled to reciprocate by eating your meat loaf. No, mutual submission means that we each serve one another in a meaningful way by contributing to the shared meal and enjoying one another’s company while we eat.

We have previously studied how “submitting to one another” (Ephesians 5:21) is implemented in the husband-wife relationship (Ephesians 5:22–33). Each partner follows Christ by bringing something different to the shared table. This week we are looking at the parent-child relationship (Ephesians 6:1-4), and we will see that Paul addresses both the father and the child while reorienting the relationship toward Christ. In the ancient world, the father was responsible for the education of the children, but we are not locked into that as a norm for the Christian assembly today.

Ephesians 6:1

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Verse 1 does not end Paul’s remarks to children, as we will see tomorrow. But the verse does show how Paul was going about his task of reframing relationships within the Christian assembly. Unlike wives, who were gently encouraged — by a borrowed participle in the Greek middle voice — to voluntarily submit to their own husbands, both children and slaves are commanded to *obey* by means of a finite verb — an unmistakable message.⁸ The Greek verb *hypakouo* means “listen to,” but it comes to mean “obey” when combined with the identification of the person being listened to.⁹ Here in verse 1, children are told to keep listening to their parents (present tense).

As to the word “children” (Greek *teknon*), Hoehner makes clear: “In this context, Paul, no doubt, had in mind children old enough to understand and exercise free will.”¹⁰ He points out that previous references for *teknon* in Ephesians have to do with adults: children of wrath (2:3), beloved children (5:1), and children of light (5:8). So, this verse has nothing to do with infants. It is surprising that some use this verse to support infant baptism.¹¹ To my mind, such an idea shows how weak the biblical case for infant baptism really is! At Christ Fellowship, we gladly baptize those children who are old enough to make a thoughtful commitment to Christ.

The phrase “in the Lord” modifies the verb “obey” and begins pointing toward the foundation for this moral action. The final clause (“for this is right”) ends with the Greek adjective *dikaios*. The standard Greek lexicon (dictionary) says, “In Greco-Roman tradition a *dikaios* person is one who upholds the customs and norms of behavior, including especially public service, that make for a well-ordered, civilized society” (with abbreviations expanded).¹²

But Paul does not want the Ephesian believers to uphold the values of Greco-Roman tradition! Christians do not learn what is moral from society; they learn it from the Lord and his word. That is why this word *dikaios*

8 A finite verb has both person and number, here second person plural.

9 ANLEX, *hypakouo*, obey, q.v.

10 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 786.

11 S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2016) 505.

12 BDAG-3, *dikaios*, upright, q.v.

has the phrase “in the Lord” before it and has a command from God to children (verse 2) following it. All our relationships must be upright *according to God’s way*. For example, if a Christian child behaves like a bully (even online), then he or she is defaming the honor of Christ and can expect consequences.

If you are a Christian young person, you may be listening more to your peers than to your parents. According to this verse, what does Jesus think about that? If you would refuse to get on a plane piloted by someone who just had their first flying lesson, why would you let someone no more experienced than you are influence your actions?

As we will see, parents must also make some changes to please Christ. But tomorrow’s lesson has more to say to children.

Day 3: God gave status to parents

Barry Applewhite, author

No doubt you realize that people are living longer these days — or at least they were until the opioid epidemic began to reduce the averages a bit. Having more time is a gift so long as we have the health to use it. But time marches on and takes a predictable toll. Eventually, aging parents require care, and that care must often come from their children.

Ephesians 6:2–3

² “Honor your father and mother” — which is the first commandment with a promise — ³ “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

What is the stated motivation for the command?

Commentary

Parental priority in Old Testament law

Since we have all drunk from the cultural well of American freedom, including the First Amendment guarantee of free speech, we may have a deficient grasp of the high status that God accords to parents in relation to their children. Though the death of Christ set aside the Old Testament law, we can still get an idea of the moral values God holds by examining its requirements. Hoehner cites the following examples that prohibited children from treating their parents in certain ways:

- Any child who beat down or seriously injured their parents was to be put to death (Exodus 21:15).
- Any persistently defiant and disobedient son was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 21:18–21).
- Anyone who dishonored either of their parents shall be cursed (Deuteronomy 27:16).¹³

I had never seen these references collected before, and they surprised me. What is not surprising is that “honor your father and mother” was the fifth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12), placing it at a very high level in God’s moral values.

Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart defines the key purposes behind the command in Exodus 20:12 when he says, “There can be little doubt that its most basic insistence . . . is to demand that children take care of their parents in their parents’ old age, when they are no longer able to work for themselves.”¹⁴

¹³ Hoehner, Ephesians, 788.

¹⁴ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006) 461.

Christ's plan for children in the assembly of believers

Since Paul includes this command (“honor your father and mother”) in Ephesians, it becomes clear that this command joins a number of other re-purposed Old Testament commands to become part of what Christ requires of us. Parents clearly fill an important role in God's created order at all times in biblical history. Remember that we are dealing here with the normal case of parents who love and care for their children. There is no responsibility for children to endure abuse.

Children and young people, I am asking you to search your heart for ways that you are not honoring your father and mother. What are those ways, and how can you better listen to Christ?

By addressing children directly, Paul is raising their status compared to the surrounding culture. He is telling children that they have a moral role to play in the body of Christ, and they will be held responsible for how they carry it out. Keep in mind that children have this importance because God says so, not because culture says so. Klyne Snodgrass reminds us that Paul always argues ethics from a Christian viewpoint, never from the surrounding culture's values.¹⁵ Culture can be both corrupt and evil: several cultures have even made child sacrifice a religious priority. The Canaanites (Amorites living in Canaan) exterminated by Joshua are one example.

After stating the basic command, Paul adds commentary (“which is the first commandment with a promise” verse 2b) before stating God's promise: “so that it may go well with you [singular] and that you [singular] may enjoy long life on the earth” (verse 3). When NIV says “*enjoy* long life,” it varies from other translations saying variants of “*live* a long time” (NET). The NIV's positive spin probably comes from the first clause (“so that it may go well for you”), though the Greek verb *eimi* (“be”) occurs here in the middle voice, which might signal personal advantage. Either way, the NIV is probably accurate. These promises are individualized, which is not common in the New Testament letters.

About 2017: crossing the historical/cultural gap

Here we encounter a problem: how do we apply this material today? Our goal cannot be to replicate first-century culture in the twenty-first century. Following Christ in the twenty-first century involves examining God's word and finding those ideas that transcend the intervening centuries. Having done so, we will usually find that twenty-first century culture heads in one direction while life in Christ heads in another.

In these two verses, the primacy of a child honoring their fathers and mothers throughout their lives is the idea we are searching for. The fact that God rewards such behavior once again shows his gracious nature. Doing what he says in relation to our parents fits this pattern: “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). [See Day 5 for the question of whether twenty-first century culture heads in a different direction. Spoiler alert: it does!]

15 Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 321.

Day 4: A long, delicate task

Barry Applewhite, author

In the introduction to this week, I noted that God has created human children with big brains and lots of curiosity so as to fit their intended purpose (when adults) to rule the world as his regents. What is needed for children, then, is love, proper care, and orientation toward God in their formative years.

If you think I am making parenthood sound too easy, my answer is that the terms I have used are very broad in their application. Also, parenthood seems all the tougher because it lasts a long time.

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

What is the one area related to “bringing them up” that Paul mentions here?

Commentary

What we find in verse 4 is a negative command in the first half of the verse and a positive command in the second half. Brief as it is, we are told what to avoid and what to do with children.

Ephesians 6:4a (what to avoid)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children;

Verse 4 is directly connected to verse 3 by the word “and” (Greek *kai*), which begins the Greek sentence, but you would never know that because all recent English versions leave it out! It seems obvious that the command to children (verses 1–3) would be connected to the command addressed to fathers (verse 4) concerning how to raise their children. They are two sides of the same relationship.

However, there are other issues to consider. First, the Greek phrase translated “fathers” is defined by the standard Greek lexicon (dictionary) to mean “parents” in this verse.¹⁶ Among recent English versions, only the Good News Bible and the Common English Bible say “parents” here, though the NET Bible Notes mention the option. Since Proverbs 1:8–9 mentions the instruction of a child by *both the father and the mother*, it seems quite likely that “parents” is the proper term in verse 4a.

You may be wondering why the standard lexicon says “parents” for Ephesians 6:4 while almost all English versions say “fathers.” Either is a legitimate translation, but the tradition of prior English translations may be the most powerful influence here. How do I know? Greek scholar William Mounce discussed his experience with such issues when he proposed an improved translation of one famous passage to his partners on one

¹⁶ BDAG-3, *pater*, father (or “parents” when plural, meaning 1.b.), q.v.

Bible translation committee: “The argument [against Mounce] was, ‘This is such a well-known verse that we can’t change it.’”¹⁷ Inertia is a fact in Bible translation just as it is in physics.

The second issue is to determine what parents are warned not to do here. The Greek verb *parorgizo* only occurs twice in the New Testament. The standard Greek lexicon offers the meaning “make angry,” a causative idea.¹⁸ Various English translations follow: “exasperate” (NIV); “provoke” (ESV, NET, HCSB, NLT, NASB, RSV); “stir up anger in” (HCSB).

We do not need a rocket scientist to tell us what might make a child angry. Scorning, mocking, humiliating, frustrating, and rebuking with anger start a long list. Of course, small children may be easily angered by the word “no” from a parent, even when it is justified and spoken graciously. Paul does not speak against necessary boundaries or parental direction. After all, learning obedience is never easy, as all adults can confirm!

Ephesians 6:4b (what to do)

instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Many Bible students are familiar with Deuteronomy 6:7 (HCSB), in which Moses speaks to parents about the primacy of teaching the commands of the covenant *between God and Israel* to their children: “Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” In place of “repeat,” some English versions say “teach” (NET, ESV). There is some disagreement here about the meaning of the rare Hebrew verb.

We are not responsible to carry out Deuteronomy 6:7 because: (1) we are members of Christ, not Israel, and (2) the death of Christ on the cross set aside the covenant between God and Israel. We in the Christian assembly share in *the new covenant* in Christ’s blood (Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25), where his blood figuratively represents his death. The New Testament explains the new covenant. Of course, the Old Testament remains sharply relevant — consider, for example, creation and God’s covenants with Abraham and David, in which we share — and the law reveals God’s character and grace even though it was for Israel.

What does carry forward from the Old Testament to the New Testament is the serious responsibility for parents to teach their children the primacy of their relationship to God through Christ. We see this not only in Ephesians 6:4b but also in Christ’s last command to his followers: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:19–20).

So, Paul is applying the command of Christ to the family and the parents’ shared responsibility to teach their children all aspects of how Christ affects their lives. We will now take a closer look at the second half of the commands to parents.

The Greek verb underlying the translation “bring them up” is *ektrepheo*, which occurs only here and in Ephesians 5:29. This is a tender and loving word. We can see that in its earlier use in the account written by the Greek historian Herodotus (c 484 – c 425 B.C.) about the early life of Cyrus the Great (598–600 B.C.). In the story, Cyrus was initially *brought up* by a herdsman’s wife named Cyno. Cyrus later described Cyno, “lavishing praise on her, and barely able to continue with his story unless it was to say ‘Cyno this’ or ‘Cyno that.’”¹⁹

17 William D. Mounce, *Greek for the Rest of Us* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 38.

18 BDAG-3, *parorgizo*, make angry, q.v.

19 Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Tom Holland (New York: Penguin Books, 2013) Book 1, sec 122.

The phrase “the training and instruction of the Lord” (verse 4b) takes a bit of explaining. Hoehner informs us that these two nouns are roughly identical in meaning.²⁰ The phrase could rightly be translated as “the correction and warning of the Lord,” but translators seem to prefer a happier spin with “training and instruction” (NIV).

While it is true that “instruction” is one of the short lexical meanings offered by the standard Greek lexicon for the second noun (Greek *nouthesia*), consider the expanded meaning given there for that noun: “counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct.”²¹ When you read “instruction,” you were thinking what — algebra and camping skills? Not so much! It’s more like: “No! That stove is hot!”

Hot stoves can burn, but spiritual dangers can destroy. So, we must give attention to the final phrase shown now in italics: “the training and instruction *of the Lord*” (verse 4b). Our unity with Christ brings us to correct our children not only about what is seen but about what is unseen. They must not make the fundamental error of leaving God out of their reckoning. “Fearing the Lord is the beginning of moral knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7a, NET). Of course, there is so much more, but the worldview we must impart is based on what Christ reveals through his life and teaching as well as what he tells us through his apostles.

If you want to know what to teach your children about moral traps and skill in living, you need look no further than the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is filled with what your growing children and young people need to know. Here, in brief, is what they must realize before they shut their ears:

*²⁹ Because they hated moral knowledge,
and did not choose to fear the LORD,*

*³⁰ they did not comply with my advice,
they spurned all my rebuke.*

*³¹ Therefore they will eat from the fruit of their way,
and they will be stuffed full of their own counsel.*

*³² For the waywardness of the simpletons will kill them,
and the careless ease of fools will destroy them.*

*³³ But the one who listens to me will live in security,
and will be at ease from the dread of harm.*

Proverbs 1:29–33 (NET)

²⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 798.

²¹ BDAG-3, *nouthesia*, instruction, q.v.

Day 5: Applying what you have learned

Barry Applewhite, author

We learned in Ephesians 6:1 that the Greek verb for “obey” starts with the meaning “listen to.” It is clear from this verse that Christ expects Christian children to listen to their parents in such a way that the parents would recognize the result as obedience. But that is exactly what some children — especially some teens — do not do. The lesser point is that such children are disobeying their parents, but the greater takeaway is that they are disobeying Christ! Such children might want to consider that they are not the first hard cases that Jesus has dealt with. A better plan would be to attack a Navy Seal team!

If you are disobeying Christ in relation to your parents, what needs to happen next? What specific decision or action is the one to change first?

Parents in America sometimes neglect their own relationship in order to serve their children’s future status in society. [I started to say, “to serve their children’s *needs*” but found that was not quite true.] Having a strong family correlates more with keeping a strong marriage than it does with the number of soccer games you ferry your children to. Even more critical is keeping the parents close to the Lord. So, a quick priority list is God first, the parental relationship second, and children third.

How does the above set of priorities fit with your family? What needs to change?

As we all know, many children live in a home with a step-parent. While the Bible does not directly address this situation, I think it is safe to say that being a parent is not strictly a question of biology. Children should obey and honor their step-parents since those step-parents are responsible to God for the care and upbringing of the children in the home.

Children and young people, are you trying to carve out space for disobedience by claiming that you need not obey a step-parent? How is that fulfilling Christ’s command to you?

Parents (including step-parents), must draw their children’s guidance from Christ, not culture.

What is the source of your child-rearing behavior? Is change needed?

Resources for Parenting

Ken Stoneking, Pastor for Small Groups

Books:

The Cure & Parents by Thralls, Lynches & McNicols

Parenting with Purpose: Winning the Heart of Your Child by Paul & Billie Kaye Tsika

RightNow Videos:

It Starts at Home by Matt Chandler, Gary Thomas & Kurt & Olivia Bruner

Parenting: The Early Years by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

Classes/Seminars/Additional Resources:

Intentional Parenting course led by Pastor David Klippert-Rowe (begins September 28, 2017)

Using authority

Week 2 | Ephesians 6:5–9

Day 1: First looks

Lisa Scheffler and Barry Applewhite, authors

When we hear the word slavery all sorts of horrible images can flood our minds — and rightly so. So how are we to feel when the Bible tells slaves to obey their earthly masters? That’s the first sentence of our passage this week. Don’t let that throw you.

As we go through the week, we’ll consider the ways first-century slavery was both alike and different from the horrific legacy of slavery in this country and what is found as a result of human trafficking around the world today. The Bible does not advocate for or endorse slavery, but recognizes its existence in the first-century culture and gives those Christians instructions on how to live with this institution in a way that honors God and each other.

As you take your first look at our central passage for the week, think about relationships that involve authority. Think about how the roles being described are ones we can all relate to because we all have people in authority over us and many of us are in a place of authority over someone else.

Ephesians 6:5–9

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

⁹ 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.

Where does class status disappear, according to these verses?

How is performance to differ between times when the masters are watching and times when they are not?

As you study this passage, begin thinking about twenty-first century contexts where authority is not equal. Do those contexts exist within the Christian assembly? If so, where?

Day 2: Restricted choices

Barry Applewhite, author

Some of us know what life is like on the low end of a cultural power structure. But the closest thing we have today to the slaves of the first century are the inmates in one of the hot, cheerless maximum-security prisons here in Texas. Imagine how you would like having someone else decide: what you eat, when you eat, what you wear, when and where you work, when you shower, when you go to recreation, and when you turn out the lights. And, no worries about all those smartphone apps!

While modern approximations of slavery are awful, we are rewarded in trying to understand the mental framework of first-century slaves because we are slaves of Christ. Our Lord gives us hope because he has been the slave of all at the cross.

Ephesians 6:5–6

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

When are Christian slaves to obey their masters?

Commentary

The social situation of slavery and the “ideal situation” of Ephesians 6:5–9

I agree with Klyne Snodgrass when he says that Ephesians 6:5–9 describes an ideal situation.²² He means that we are dealing with Christian slaves serving Christian masters. Remember that these sets of commands (Ephesians 5:22–6:9) are called “household codes,” and the household involved is *the assembly of Christians in Ephesus*. The most likely way for a slave to become a Christian in the first century was for an entire family and household — including slaves and freedmen — to accept Christ as a unit. Consider, for example, the conversion of the Philippian jailer “together with his entire household” (Acts 16:34, NET).

We have previously noted that first-century slavery was nothing like that known in North America, partly because masters and slaves were racially the same and partly because ancient slavery offered opportunity for eventual freedom, education, and even Roman citizenship in some cases. However, at its worst, slavery was a short road to death in the mines or the routine experience of awful things. One author says: “Slaves were nothing like today’s employees. Rather, they were their masters’ property, living under the same roof and

²² Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 327.

available in every way, including sexually, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”²³

If you want to learn more about what God expects of Christians (including slaves) living in less than ideal situations, see 1 Peter 2:13–21. Slavery for some of the poor was a sad necessity. Consider the Parable of the Compassionate Father — also called the Parable of the Prodigal Son — when the younger son runs out of money and hires out to a citizen in the far country (Luke 15:15–16): even though he was a hired laborer, he was starving, and “no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16). In contrast to that, slave owners generally provided their slaves with food, clothing, shelter, and care when they were sick.²⁴

Ephesians 6:5

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Like the case of children, Paul gives believing slaves the dignity of recognizing them as moral agents, responsible to Christ for their conduct. Speaking of the distinctions between social classes in the Greco-Roman world, Snodgrass says that the usual valuations of society were rejected in what Paul commands. For the sake of peace with the majority population, Christian slaves are still told to obey their Christian masters.

The Greek text describes these masters with the Greek phrase *kata sarka*, meaning “according to the flesh,” implying that they are masters from a human perspective. The Greek noun translated as “master” is *kurios*, the word that is also translated as “Lord” when it refers to Christ.

The required obedience is ongoing, and that is the force of the present-tense command to obey. More than that, these slaves must continue to respond “with respect and fear.” The reason is simple, to do otherwise in any public setting would bring public shame on the cause of Christ and likely place both slave and master in great danger. That is a practical reason, and Paul soon adds a theological one.

The main thing Paul does in relation to Christian slaves is to remind them of their need to obey Christ with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart. He commands them to broaden that attitude to embrace their Christian masters as well.

Ephesians 6:6

Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

It is hardly surprising that first-century slaves had a reputation for being lazy and for lying. That sort of passive-aggressive behavior is common in similar settings today. I’m reminded of the 1960s worker on a collective egg farm in Russia who said, “They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work.”²⁵

Paul gets quite creative with his language in the first half of verse 6, but the NIV has smoothed over the edges, first by adding the words “obey them” at the front. The literalness of the ESV comes through in their

23 Sandra L. Glahn, “Weaker Vessels and Calling Husbands ‘Lord’: Was Peter Insulting Wives?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174 (January - March 2017) 63.

24 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 802.

25 As quoted by the Moscow Bureau Chief for *The New York Times* in the 1960s.

translation: “not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers” (verse 6a). The idea behind “eye-service” is that the slave works hard when the master is nearby, but they slack off when no one is looking. “People-pleasers” should not need an explanation in any age!

In verse 6b, Paul makes clear that a Christian slave is working for Christ — who is always watching — and so that slave should be “doing the will of God from your heart.” No Christian slave is a normal slave!

“Servant” or “slave”?

While we are at it, this is a good time to talk about the Greek noun *doulos*. English translations start going crazy when they see this word, and they try to soften its meaning. Here in Ephesians 6, they can say “slave” because they are describing the ancient master/slave relationship. So far, so good. But the word is found in other places where its deeper implications are clear.

Romans 1:1 says, “From Paul, a *slave* of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (NET). The NET Bible Notes for this verse say: “Though [*doulos*] is normally translated ‘servant,’ the word does not bear the connotation of a free individual serving another.” They are politely saying that you the reader normally see the word “servant” and think of *a free individual serving someone else*, but that is not what *doulos* means. The writers of the NET Bible Notes go on to say that a more accurate translation would be “bondslave,” meaning someone who sells himself into slavery to another — usually as a temporary measure to gain some advantage — but modern readers don’t know about that old Roman practice.

So, what are the translators to do? Many have agreed to join Bible translation projects intended to make the Bible contemporary, but we don’t practice slavery today, lack familiarity with its ancient nuances, and certainly find slavery offensive. While the word “servant” is not accurate, at least people of all education levels know what that is. The choice that translators often make is “servant.” I would prefer the translation “slave” and a marginal note to explain.

The fallout from this translation choice of “servant” is to mislead Christians into thinking they are servants of Christ and not his slaves. But what did you think it meant when we call him “Lord”? Douglas Moo, the head of the NIV’s Committee on Bible Translation, says, “For Paul, ‘Lord,’ expressing both Jesus’ cosmic majesty and his status as master of the believer, is the single best title to express the true significance of Jesus.”²⁶ The huge difference when Jesus is your Master is that he loves you enough to make you part of God’s family. The Lord of all grace is *your* Lord!

What is your reaction to being reminded that you are Christ’s slave? What does that reaction reveal about your commitment to Christ?

“For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave [*doulos*]” (1 Corinthians 7:22).

26 Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996) 50.

Day 3: Triangular relations

Barry Applewhite, author

On some of those long Sunday afternoons when the Dallas Cowboys were taking a whipping, I found that this experience was endurable if they were giving their best effort. It is ironic to read today that God also expects wholehearted service.

We get a surprise when we look at the master-slave relationship more closely, because it turns out to be a three-sided relationship that includes Christ. That really changes the dynamics!

Ephesians 6:7–8

⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

What is the stated motive here, and which Christians does it apply to?

Commentary

Because we modern folk have become so accustomed to short sentences, translators strive to please us by frequently inserting periods. The NIV translators did so at the end of verse 6: “Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.” The problem is that Paul was not finished with his thought. As a result, to begin verse 7, the NIV had to promote a mere participle (“rendering service with a good will,” ESV) into a full-featured command (“Serve wholeheartedly”). However, Greek grammar expert Daniel Wallace says that such participles acting as commands are “quite rare,” and he cites a further expert who says they should be so translated as a last resort.²⁷

Why should you care? I have always felt that it was easier to keep five commands than ten, so I become unhappy when commands are created to make short English sentences work. Or, to put the matter more plainly, I would rather be commanded by Christ than by the NIV translators!

Ephesians 6:7

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people,

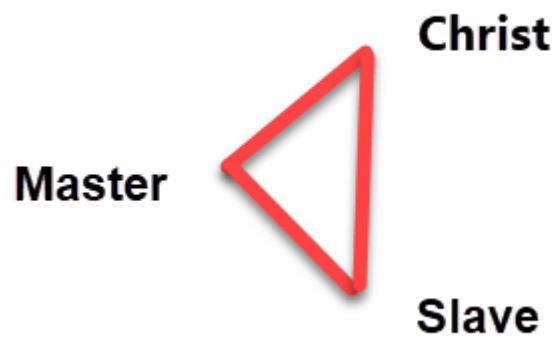
In the previous lesson I discussed the fact that we are slaves of Christ rather than servants. Such conclusions are harder for you to accept when you keep reading variants of “serve,” and verse 7 has two of them. The Greek verb here is *douleuo*, which means to “perform the duties of a slave, serve.”²⁸ This is the second meaning for the verb, and its primary meaning is to “be a slave.”

²⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 650.

²⁸ BDAG-3, *douleuo*, be a slave, perform as a slave, q.v.

A second important word is the Greek noun *eunoia*, translated as “wholeheartedly” and meaning “good attitude, willingness.”²⁹ This word was often used in diplomatic documents to indicate a willingness to show up for battle when one of your allies was attacked. So, it conveys a good attitude and readiness to do what needs to be done even when the task is hard.

Paul reframes the master-slave relationship, by saying that the slave should carry it out for Christ, not for the human being giving the orders. As in the case of wives and husbands and the case of children and parents, *this relationship is three-sided, not two-sided.*



Ephesians 6:8

because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

Paul makes explicit what is already obvious (“you know”). We learned in Ephesians 2:10 that God had in mind good works for us to perform after we accepted his abundant grace in Jesus Christ. While human masters might take such willing performance for granted — though Christian masters should not be so oblivious — the Lord will not forget or fail to reward. In fact, the Greek phrase underlying “whatever good they do” was moved by Paul toward the front of the sentence to emphasize how comprehensive the offer of reward was.³⁰

Human masters might promise a reward and then forget or fail to perform. God’s gracious reward will come no matter what!

29 BDAG-3, *eunoia*, willingness, q.v.

30 William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009) 152.

Day 4: One Master, without favorites

Barry Applewhite, author

Like every other culture — except one — there are numerous ways in which we rank one another. Why else do you think that Harvard is ten times harder to get into than Texas A&M or any other good school? We all know that there are good colleges and elite colleges, and to keep everything straight a rating is redone every year. Those who aspire to the master class must climb the right ladder.

How much money you make, where you live, how big your house is, what kind of car you drive, how many media followers you have, and how many powerful people you are seen with are just a few of our ranking tools. And I haven't even touched the negative side: have you ever used drugs, been arrested, or cheated on your spouse? You will find yourself stuck at the bottom of the ladder. You see how this goes. Society keeps score by its own rating system.

Then there is that one culture where none of this counts: the assembly of believers in Christ.

Ephesians 6:9

⁹ 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.

How are masters to treat their own slaves?

Commentary

Summing up all relational authority in Christ

There are two clauses in verse 9 that bring a serious jolt to the interpretation of the entire household code (Ephesians 5:22–6:9):

- “Masters, treat your slaves in the same way.”
- “There is no favoritism with him [Christ].”

To open the discussion, we will first consider the second clause: “There is no favoritism with him [Christ].” Remember that I have told you the household code deals only with Christians, and we get further proof in verse 9 when masters and slaves are both told that they have the same Master (Greek *kurios*). So, within the Christian assembly, Christ shows no favoritism to husbands, parents, and masters, even though the outer society shows them vast deference!

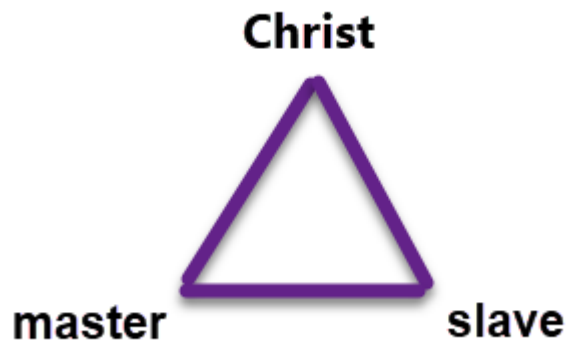
This finding should not come as a surprise in view of what Paul says elsewhere and what Jesus taught his disciples:

- “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)
- Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*], and whoever wants to be first must be slave [*doulos*] of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
(Mark 10:42–45)

The wise person will start with what Jesus told his disciples when he found them arguing over who was the greatest. Jesus contrasted the power-mad Gentile society with the rule of life for his own disciples. New Testament scholar R. T. France calls this section “the most powerful statement yet of the alternative value scale of the kingdom of God.”³¹ He adds, “The natural expectations of society are reversed, and leadership is characterized by service, being under the authority of others, like a *diakonos* [servant] or *doulos* [slave].”³²

Next we will shift attention to the first clause: “Masters, treat your slaves in the same way” (verse 9a). The idea that Paul would teach something different from Jesus about relationships of power among Christ’s followers must be considered some form of special pleading — some attempt to maintain the cultural status quo *within the assembly of believers*. That cannot be considered sound biblical interpretation or application.

After declaring Paul’s command to masters “shocking,” Snodgrass adds, “For them to follow this instruction, they would have to treat their slaves with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart as to Christ.”³³ In the diagram I presented to you in the previous lesson, we found a triangular relationship between Christ, Christian masters, and their Christian slaves. Today we learn that the triangle must be finalized to put Christ at the apex of the triangle and the other two on the same level at each end of the base.



Witherington describes the radical change we have found in verse 9: “Here Paul, in not so subtle a way, indicates that the real Master of these slaves is Christ, just as he is the real Master of the owners.”³⁴

31 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) 419.

32 Ibid.

33 Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 324.

34 Witherington, *Ephesians*, 342.

More about Ephesians 6:9

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.

Though I have already revealed my view of this verse, two more things deserve mention. First, masters in the Greco-Roman world had such authority over slaves that they could do anything to them or with them. I will spare you gruesome examples, but they are not hard to find. It is not too much to say that life and death were within the master's discretion. In such an atmosphere, threats toward slaves were the primary method of motivation. So, the greatest practical step Paul makes is to take threats away from Christian masters.

Since none of us is a slave-owner, go back to the husband-wife and parent-child relationships and ask yourself these questions: what role do threats play in these relationships and what does Jesus want instead?

The next vital thing to consider in verse 9 is the Greek noun *prosopolempsia*, meaning “partiality, favoritism, prejudice.”³⁵ We find a good example of this in Deuteronomy 10:17–18, where God is said to be impartial and one who cannot be bribed (verse 17). Then (verse 18): “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” If only all Christians could behave like God!

Implications

So, what is the deeper significance of this entire section on household relationships? *Every single relationship is changed by our unity with Christ.* Why are they changed? One reason is that Christ rejects the cultural valuations established by society in relation to certain groups of people. In most ancient cultures, those groups deemed to be of lesser value included women/wives, children, and slaves. Paul expresses the contrary evaluation made by Christ in Galatians 3:28 by saying, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is Christ's will within the assembly of believers.

So, who are the groups today that are implicitly or explicitly downgraded within the dominant culture? People of color, foreigners, the poor, the drug-addicted, the 1 in 3 Americans with a criminal record, the mentally ill, and those with chronic illness are all valued less in our culture. There are also strong incentives in our culture to devalue those with different political views or different religious affiliations.

We already know how Jesus wants us to treat these categories of people when they belong to the assembly, but what about when they are outsiders? While this is not the time for a full exploration of that topic, Paul says in his letter to the Galatians: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, *let us do good to all people*, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). I say again: Jesus does not accept the valuations that society places on different classes of people! He gave a big clue when he died for the sins of the world, not just for the favored few. In keeping with his action, we should not waste this opportunity to deal with a divisive sin: racism.

35 ANLEX, *prosopolempsia*, prejudice, partiality, q.v.

I am proud that part of our identity as Christ Fellowship is to declare “All welcome — people of grace” as part of our core values. In Ephesians 5:1, Paul commanded us: “be imitators of God as dearly loved children” (NET). To do that, we must become those who are without prejudice. There can be no excuse or justification for racism in the assembly of believers. To be candid, various Christian groups have historically failed to separate themselves from the politics of their times and, as a result, have justified what was unjustifiable under Christ. We must learn a lesson from their failure.

Now that we see how this material on household codes penetrates to the core of our worldly values and our prejudices, we find a target-rich environment for applications. The more general case is any cultural context where one group or person holds a measure of authority over others. Among many other cases (the military services, schools, and government), that does take us back to employees and their supervisors.

Whether you are the employee or the supervisor, how are you going to defend your behavior in this common relationship when you give an accounting to Christ? For supervisors: how do you handle the implementation of decisions by higher management that you know will bring adversity on those below you? For those being supervised: how do you work as unto Christ when those around you are giving you grief for making them look less productive?

We can be thankful that Christ Fellowship is pointing us in the direction that Christ wants us to take. The Holy Spirit will do his part, and the question is whether each of us will do ours. If not, the One who is impartial will sort it out.

Day 5: Applying what you have learned

Barry Applewhite, author

Sad to say, most employment settings are not all-Christian, which is the context Ephesians addresses. However, doing your job as if you are doing it for Christ is still the best working strategy in all settings. If the ethics practiced by your company or the products and services it offers do not satisfy Christ, then you should consider changing employers.

How does the authority relationship between you and your supervisor affect your daily walk as a person serving Christ? In cases where you are the supervisor, do you carry out those responsibilities using the grace and love that Christ shows you? Explain.

We don't do politics at Christ Fellowship, but neither do we ignore their negative effects on the assembly. Political communications made by factions push very hard to stir up your feelings against people you don't even know and who you "understand" only by untested assumptions. After all, "prejudice" means to prejudge before the truth is known. Some of these valuations were learned in our earliest years but never questioned. Jesus *does* question them!

What is your attitude and behavior toward those not valued by society or by the political faction that you favor? How does your tendency to categorize certain groups and deny their value line up with the revealed truth that God shows no favoritism or prejudice?

There are plenty of things that need doing at Christ Fellowship, and their accomplishment may never be seen by anyone other than Christ. Sometimes the measure of our walk with Christ is seen through these humanly-unrewarded actions. For example, many serve in Promiseland with distinction, but their service is not widely known.

Do you find that you are able and willing to serve wholeheartedly even without reward? How does your answer help you determine whether you are serving the Lord or simply trying to gain status with others?

Resources for authority relationships

Ken Stoneking, Pastor for Small Groups

Books:

The Switch: Your Monday Revolution by Doug Spada

Work as Worship by Mark Russell & Drew Steffen

RightNow Videos:

The Monday Switch: Six Steps to God's Power on Monday by Doug Spada

Work as Worship Leadership Experience by Dave Ramsey & others

Classes/Seminars/Additional Resources:

WorkLife at <http://www.CFhome.org/next-step/resource-library/living-faith-at-work/>

Day of battle

Week 3 | Ephesians 6:10–17

Day 1: First looks

Barry Applewhite, author

The worst kinds of attacks are those that find you unprepared. Ask the dead at Pearl Harbor.

Winning against spiritual forces of evil requires the right preparation, the proper weapons, and a winning strategy. However, we must avoid getting preoccupied with the enemy, as some do. Our focus must remain on the Lord and on doing what he put us here to accomplish.

Ephesians 6:10–17

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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.

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish 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.

What is the source of our strength?

What is the one offensive weapon named in this metaphor?

Who is the enemy? What are his tactics?

Day 2: Where is the arsenal?

Barry Applewhite, author

As a former military officer, I find the study of ancient weapons and tactics fascinating. But those who get lost in trivia about Roman armor in Ephesians 6 have missed the point: our enemies are spiritual, not physical, and the weapons to defeat them are not physical either.

Ephesians 6:10–12

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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.

What is our struggle not against?

Commentary

Paul's literary plan

To understand this week's biblical text, you have to take into account Paul's purpose in writing Ephesians and the way that such statements were put together in the first century. That sentence sounds foggy, so let's fix that! At the beginning of our Ephesians study, I told you that Ephesians is a celebratory statement. Celebrating what? Ephesians celebrates all that God has done for us in Christ.

In essence, Paul set up the letter to:

- Praise God for what he has done through the riches of his grace in Christ;
- Explain in more detail how what Christ has done affects the entire assembly;
- Urge every member of the assembly to live out their shared values in Christ, no matter what.

In Ephesians 6:1–20, we have reached the final stage of that literary plan. In urging the Ephesians to rise to the spiritual battle, Paul sprinkles numerous references to the major themes of the letter while *trying to engage their emotions*.³⁶ Paul uses an extended metaphor of a Greek or Roman warrior putting on his entire array of defensive and offensive equipment (verses 13–17) together with a dramatic description of the devil and his attacking forces (verses 11–12, 16).

As Witherington points out, we run the risk of confusing the powerful method of engaging his readers with

³⁶ Witherington, *Ephesians*, 345.

the mistaken idea that these evil forces actually have a chance of winning in their battle against Christ.³⁷ Jesus put that issue to rest in Matthew 16:18 by saying that he would build his assembly of believers, “and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (ESV).

A second wrong turn is to put unnecessary emphasis on spiritual warfare as a topic for Christian growth. Some believers get lost in this stuff just like others do with Bible prophecy. So, how do you keep these things in perspective? Perhaps you have noticed that at Christ Fellowship we generally preach through books of the Bible verse-by-verse. By doing so, we expose you to the topics God wants all of us to understand *in the proportion that he chose to give those topics*. Topical studies (e.g., the Holy Spirit or salvation by grace) have their place as well, but you always face the challenge of making sure that verses are being quoted in a way that is consistent with their biblical context. Well, I’d best get back to Ephesians!

Where is the arsenal?

Christ is the arsenal holding all the weapons needed for this battle.

Ephesians 6:10

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

The phrase “his mighty power” also appears (in Greek) in Ephesians 1:19, where it is connected to the power necessary to raise Christ from the dead and seat him at God’s right hand (verse 1:20). So, how much power are we talking about? Whatever is necessary to get the job done. God’s power in Christ has no limit!

Verse 10 gives the theme for this entire section, and it contains a command: “be strong” (Greek *endunamoo*). We need to know at least four things about this verb. **First**, Snodgrass reminds us that this command — like all the others in this section of Ephesians — is *plural*, addressing every member of the assembly.³⁸ As hard as it is for Americans to get, Christianity is a *team* activity. If you like, we watch each other’s back during this fight.

Second, the Greek verb *endunamoo* is in the middle voice, meaning the subject is personally involved in the action, and the translation I prefer is “strengthen yourselves in the Lord.”³⁹ How do you do that? By reading this study guide to better understand Ephesians! Then, get more involved in a life group. Carry out the four practices shown on the Christ Fellowship website (www.CFhome.org/im-new/about-us/our-identity): engage God individually, connect in a group, worship in a gathering, and impact others. All of these are ways to know Christ better and draw strength from him. Which brings us to the next point.

Third, “strengthen yourselves” is a command! No one is going to do it for you. We are all busy putting on our own equipment for battle. I can check your preparation, but I can’t put on your gear.

Fourth, the verb is in the Greek present tense, which is used in Ephesians for something that is done continuously. We keep drawing our strength from Christ. To put this in different words: we can stop when Christ tells us to stop, but that isn’t going to happen in this world.

37 Witherington, *Ephesians*, 345.

38 Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 339.

39 William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009) 154 and 156.

Ephesians 6:11

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

After giving the general command in verse 10, Paul begins his extended metaphor: dressing in battle gear. Verse 11 implements verse 10, so we strengthen ourselves in the Lord by taking up all the equipment he offers us. The command “put on” is standard for getting dressed, but we are getting dressed for spiritual battle. The phrase “the full armor” represents the Greek noun *panoplia*, meaning: “the complete equipment of a heavy-armed soldier.”⁴⁰ “Armor” (NIV) can be misleading as an English translation since shoes are also part of the equipment (verse 15) and so is a sword (verse 19).

The purpose for gearing up is “so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” Some of you remember the movie *Gladiator* with Russell Crowe playing the dishonored General Maximus and defeating his opponents in the Colosseum. Well, gladiators were on their own, but Roman soldiers normally fought as a group, shoulder to shoulder. A more common scenario than single combat was a horde of barbarians flinging themselves against a solid line of Roman shields. The Roman strategy was to withstand this assault before counter-attacking. Paul knows this and says, “take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Paul presents the Ephesian believers as targets of the enemy general: the devil. The devil will send his forces against them using “schemes” (Greek *methodia*). One Greek lexicon (dictionary) brings out several facets of this noun with the following meanings: “stratagems, cunning attacks, tricks.”⁴¹ Describing the devil, Jesus said, “He is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

But, by using all the battle gear that God provides, believers become able to take their stand. Together.

Are you one of those just-me-and-God kind of Christians — a lone wolf? If so, explain why you are fighting alone, leaving your brothers and sisters without your support.

Ephesians 6:12

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.

Paul explains here why we need all the battle gear that God provides: our fight is against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” With that in mind, we will go back and look at some individual parts of this extraordinary statement.

First, our “struggle” expresses the Greek noun *pale*, a word that refers to both wrestling and hand-to-hand-combat.⁴² As a sport, wrestling had the aim of throwing the opponent off his feet, but in a battle context that would mean his swift death. Second, this fight was not between us and other human beings (“flesh and

40 BDAG-3, *panoplia*, the complete equipment of a heavy-armed soldier, q.v.

41 ANLEX, *methodia*, cunning attacks, q.v.

42 Baugh, *Ephesians*, 544.

blood”). By uniting with Christ, we joined a new battle against a new kind of enemy.

In the middle of verse 12, Paul describes this new enemy in four ways:

- “the rulers”
- “the authorities”
- “the powers of this dark world”
- “**and** the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”

There are two ways to look at this list. First, it could be an attempt to make a distinction between either three or four types of spiritual beings under the leadership of the devil. Second, it is an intentional rhetorical device to emphasize the danger by piling up terms.

The first view could be correct, but trying for a more exact identification proves impossible because there is so little data. Yet there are people willing to try, and Snodgrass expresses his low opinion of such efforts by saying, “*Attempts to rank spiritual forces is groundless and fanciful speculation*” (emphasis original).⁴³

Do you see the conjunction “and” at the beginning of the fourth phrase above? The NIV translators are trying to make smooth English here but that conjunction gives the false impression of a simple list. The problem is that the Greek text has no such conjunction! Attempts to give extra help sometimes don’t help.

Both Snodgrass⁴⁴ and Witherington⁴⁵ take the second view, and both take the final term to be useful summary of all of them. This piling of terms is meant to create emphasis and a determination to prepare for serious spiritual attack. This second view seems correct to me.

43 Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 340.

44 Ibid.

45 Witherington, *Ephesians*, 350.

Day 3: Hold the line!

Barry Applewhite, author

Americans are famous for living in the moment, not for remembering their history. Perhaps because I was born during World War II, I have long had an interest in reading about it. After the disastrous sneak attack at Pearl Harbor (12/7/1941), it took time for America to begin fighting back.

We did so at sea near Midway (06/1942) and then on an obscure island named Guadalcanal. The 1st division of the Marine Corps had 850 men holding a ridge to protect a crucial airfield, and they were repeatedly attacked by 3000 Japanese troops, but they held the line through a savage night of battle (9/13/1942). The Imperial Japanese Army had never lost such a battle, but they had never faced the United States Marines! Semper Fi.

What the Lord asks of us is to get ready for spiritual battle and then to *hold the line*.

Ephesians 6:13–15

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Commentary

Ephesians 6:13

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.

Verse 13 looks backward to the spiritual enemies revealed in verse 12 and uses them as the basis for a new command: “take up the full armor of God” (verse 13a, NET). As before, “armor” (NIV) refers to the entire array of equipment used by a heavy-armed soldier.

At this point, following “so that,” the NIV makes one of its occasional additions to the original Greek text and offers us a final product that sounds more convincing than it really is. The added word is the verb “comes” in the phrase “when the day of evil *comes*.” By adding this verb, the NIV translators give the impression that *a particular evil day* — whether literal or metaphorical — is still on the way. While that is a valid expectation, our first task is to translate this verse without making additions (1) that the reader never knows about, and (2) that may change the interpretation of it. Such a translation is readily available.

The ESV gives a more even-handed translation of verse 13a: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.” Here is the key: *the days are already evil*, as we were explicitly told in Ephesians 5:16. We are not waiting for something to come when it is already here. Today is the evil day and so is tomorrow, which explains why the summary command in verse 10 to strengthen ourselves in the Lord’s mighty power was given in the present tense. Remember the motto of the Navy Seals: “The only easy day was yesterday.”

Consider the devil's concerted attempt to tempt Jesus (Luke 4:1–15 and Matthew 4:1–11). The devil initiates each one of the attacks, and Jesus does nothing more than stand his ground using the truth revealed in the word of God. When the devil was done, Luke says, "He [Satan] left him [Jesus] until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). Yes, he would be back against Jesus, just as he returns to hit us.

What kind of spiritual attacks have come your way and how did you face them? What did you learn?

The second half of verse 13 is self-explanatory, except for the phrase "done everything." Since this is a middle-voice verbal form, the sense is "done everything *for yourselves*." If every member of the assembly has all the battle gear that God offers, then there is benefit to both self and others in preparing yourself to stand.

Ephesians 6:14–15

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Remember that the image is meant to be rousing to prepare believers for the spiritual battle at hand and, as a matter of proper rhetoric, to conclude the Ephesian letter on a high note. After once again stressing the prime directive to "stand firm" (verse 14), Paul begins to identify various parts of the *panoplia*, the array of battle gear that God provides for us:

- truth
- personal righteousness
- spiritual readiness (that comes from the gospel of peace)

Hoehner ably defines truth when he says that it "has the basic idea of reality that is reliable and trustworthy as opposed to that which is false."⁴⁶ Remember that our enemy is led by the devil, a notorious liar. If someone claims faith in Christ and yet makes a practice of telling lies, they are likely mistaken on all points.

Since about 1960, the truth — both about spiritual matters and about the creation we live in — has been under continuous assault from many directions. That is an entire subject of its own. For now, trust that God has equipped you with the mental means to analyze the world around you through careful investigation and verification. As a Christian, you enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will help you find the truth, and you have the reliable Scriptures to guide you. But *seeking* the truth and *living by* the truth will always be your task.

Righteousness in this context is simply a matter of doing what is right according to God. The entire New Testament is designed to train you in making ethical decisions and taking actions that please God. Even an unbelieving world will have a hard time finding fault with behavior that pleases God.

Readiness related to the gospel of peace is a bit more difficult. Keep in mind that the word "gospel" means

⁴⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 839.

“good news” and (in the New Testament) always refers to the good news about what God has done through Jesus Christ. In this case, Paul focuses on the peace brought by Christ between God and humankind, and between each of us in Christ no matter what our diverse backgrounds may be (Ephesians 2:14–18). Because our relationships are solid both vertically and horizontally, we are ready to face opposition from outside by using our unity in Christ.

Day 4: More battle gear

Barry Applewhite, author

Sometimes I am amazed that certain people make a fortune by stating the obvious. They do so by dressing up well-known spiritual values as if they were a miraculously discovered secret. In the previous lesson, Paul spoke about truth, personal righteousness, and spiritual readiness. Below he will stress the value of faith, salvation, and the word of God. Every one of these elements is something you can and must use effectively in serving Christ.

Ephesians 6:16–17

¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish 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.

What weapon does the evil one employ?

Commentary

Ephesians 6:16

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

The phrase (“in addition to all this”) looks back to the previous parts of the God-provided battle gear: truth, personal righteousness, and spiritual readiness. Remember that dressing ourselves with a full set of battle gear started in verse 14 where we were given the command to “stand.” Each piece of the gear then becomes a *means* by which we take that stand. In verse 16, we stand “by taking up the shield of faith” (NET).

Such shields found use as a critical defense against missiles. The Roman shields were made of wood (two layers) and stood 4 feet tall and 2.5 feet wide, with a curved front surface to better deflect missiles.⁴⁷ The front surface was covered first with canvas and then (on top) with calf’s skin, which would be soaked with water to quench flames.⁴⁸ Since soldiers would stand side-by-side, the shields could be overlapped for maximum protection. I have explained this one piece of gear since Paul has described a specific form of attack (“flaming arrows”) that demonstrates the shield’s necessity.

But what is faith? My own definition is: faith is a *commitment* to obey the Lord and to change as he directs. New Testament faith seldom consists of mental assent to what we are told and no more. Faith involves trusting what the Lord reveals to us and taking committed action. I may say that I believe airplanes can fly, but such faith is of little value until I get aboard and take off.

⁴⁷ Polybius, *Histories*, 6.23.

⁴⁸ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 552-3, and see an actual shield at the following link: <http://bit.ly/2fF1gzc>.

A great number of vital biblical words have this practical emphasis. For example, take the simple verb “hear.” That word only begins with the sound hitting the eardrums of the listener. Consider what Jesus said: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice* is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). Because of this practical emphasis, Jesus can say the following and expect to be understood: “The one who has ears had better listen!” (Matthew 11:15, NET).

In the current context, faith involves committing ourselves to stand together by using all the battle gear that Christ provides and taking seriously the fact that a spiritual battle is going on. Of course, such a faith-commitment interacts with our unity, shared love, and our desire to serve each other.

To what extent has your Christian life to this point included some confusion about the meaning of “faith”? How do you understand faith now?

Ephesians 6:17

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

As would be true in an actual battle, the soldier is commanded to grab his helmet and sword last, as the enemy approaches.⁴⁹ But there is an unanswered question here: why are believers taking up a helmet of *salvation*? Most commentators faithfully report that the helmet of salvation comes from Isaiah 59:17.⁵⁰

In short, Ephesians 6:17 uses Isaiah 59 to show how we — in Christ — are taking part in the same battle against sin and evil that Christ won decisively at the cross. In the Appendix to this lesson, I can only give a sketch of the deeper action. At the cross, Jesus has already accomplished our deliverance from sin and death, but these enemies will not be finally destroyed until after his return. So, in obedience to our Lord, we take our stand until he comes.

The one offensive weapon in our hands is the sword whose source is the Spirit, and that sword represents the word of God. Recall that Jesus used this weapon during his own initial period of temptation by the devil (Luke 4:1–15 and Matthew 4:1–11), and we follow him by using it as well.

So, the final array of battle gear provided for us by Christ is as follows:

- truth
- personal righteousness
- spiritual readiness (that comes from the gospel of peace)
- faith (as obedient response)
- salvation (as deliverance)
- the word of God.

⁴⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 849.

⁵⁰ Baugh, *Ephesians*, 555. His explanation leaves much to be desired!

Appendix to Day 4: Isaiah 59 and Ephesians 6:17

[Note: This material is more technical and may not be of interest to all readers.]

Isaiah 59 tells the story of God’s willingness to save the repentant among his people from their sinfulness and to put both his Spirit and his word within them. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul was using midrash, a well-known technique of Jewish exposition of the Scriptures. Richard Longnecker explains, “[Midrashic interpretation] may be characterized by the maxim ‘that has relevance to this’ — that is, what is written in Scripture has relevance to our present situation.”⁵¹

As Paul was writing this section of Ephesians, he remembered the theme of deliverance [salvation] in Isaiah 59. In Longnecker’s terms, “that [Isaiah 59] has relevance to this [Ephesians 6:17].” Christian Bible students make such connections all the time, but we don’t let ourselves do it with quite the same boldness exhibited by Jewish interpreters such as Paul.

Isaiah 59:1 (NET) says, “Look, the LORD’s hand is not too weak to deliver you; his ear is not too deaf to hear you.” Then, after reviewing their sinfulness and their confession of sin, we find Isaiah 59:16 (NET): “He sees there is no advocate [Hebrew “man”]; he is shocked that no one intervenes. So he takes matters into his own hands; his desire for justice drives him on.”

Before setting out to punish his enemies, God puts on armor symbolizing the battle to come (Isaiah 59:17): “He put on **righteousness as his breastplate**, and the **helmet of salvation** on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.”

If not earlier in the text, Christ now appears in Isaiah 59:20: “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.” The passage ends with God’s ongoing promise in Isaiah 59:21: “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD. “**My Spirit**, who is on you, will not depart from you, and **my words** that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants — from this time on and forever,” says the LORD.”

Hopefully, the theme of deliverance in the common language marked by bold-face print will help you see some of the connections that attracted Paul. Further development of the connections between the two passages would require analysis designed to isolate the role of the Messiah in Isaiah 59.

51 Richard N. Longnecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999) 22.

Day 5: Applying what you have learned

Barry Applewhite, author

We American Christians seem to style ourselves after some medical doctors: we aim to be specialists rather than general practitioners. So, some of us are strong in Bible study and interpretation. Others pride themselves (in a good sense) in being Prayer Warriors. Another group of believers are beloved for their acts of love. Serving faithfully is the specialty of another group. All of these things are good, but I have questions:

Who told you that you could put on only part of the battle gear that God offers us? [“No one” is the right answer.] So, what are you going to do to seek spiritual maturity in all areas? What is your next step?

Jesus said: “I am the way and *the truth* and the life” (John 14:6). Yet theologian Lesslie Newbigin tells us: “We are in the age of postmodernity. The mark of this is a suspicion of all claims to universal truth.” He goes on to say that our greatest cultural product is the work of science, “yet there is now profound skepticism about science itself.”⁵² Jesus and postmodernism cannot both be right! In the current war on all kinds of truth, Christians cannot sit on the sidelines and pretend they have nothing at risk.

To what extent are you committed to Jesus as the very embodiment of truth? How have you stood your ground for the truth, and how have you just floated along with the popular skepticism? What changes do you need to make?

In expressing his view that Christians give the devil far too much respect, Snodgrass says: “The biblical witness is clear. Evil is a reality, even a threat, but there is no reason for alarm or anxiety. God’s victory is certain. Sin will not win and is not Lord.”⁵³

How can you avoid being sidetracked by curiosity about evil spirits? More important, how can you make sure that your focus is on strengthening your relationship to Christ and his people? What needs your attention to get this done?

⁵² Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995) 27.

⁵³ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 349.

Resources for spiritual warfare

Ken Stoneking, Pastor for Small Groups

Books:

The Spiritual Warfare Answer Book by David Jeremiah

Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical & Balanced Perspective by Brian Borgman & Rob Ventura

RightNow Videos:

The Invisible War by Chip Ingram

Disarming the Darkness by Pete Briscoe

Classes/Seminars/Additional Resources:

The Christian Life Academy Course, Issue 3

Drifting or praying?

Week 4 | Ephesians 6:18–23

Day 1: First looks

Barry Applewhite, author

Many of us in North Texas have a lot of reasons to be overconfident. Even if life has had some bumps up to this point, we can still say, “So far, so good.” Of course, that statement is one step away from: “I’ve got this!”

Then we pick up our study guide — like any right-thinking Christian! — and read about the Apostle Paul, chained under house arrest in Rome awaiting a chance to appeal his capital case to Nero, one of the most evil emperors Rome ever produced. Now think about it: if things can go so wrong for a Roman citizen who has done nothing to deserve death and who was personally picked by Jesus for this mission, what makes you think that all you have ahead is blissful days filled with playlist songs? Or consider Jesus, who did no wrong. How did that work out?

A little detective work will tell you that Jesus prayed every day, sometimes rising before dawn to do so alone. And Paul begins this week’s lesson urging frequent prayer upon us all. What did they know that we have not quite figured out?

Ephesians 6:18–24

¹⁸ 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 Lord’s people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, 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.

²¹ 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.

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters, 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.

How many forms of the word “all” do we have in verse 18?

If the first paragraph is about prayer, why do you think paragraph two has its particular content?

What does Paul wish for all believers in the final paragraph?

Day 2: A word to the wise

Barry Applewhite, author

Many years have passed since my military training, but one order I recall with ease: “Keep your head on a swivel!” Hopefully, those of you who have done study guides for a while will recognize a metaphor. It means: constantly look in all directions for possible danger. Wonderful advice in a battle zone.

Paul seems to have the view that some dangers you see, and some you don't see. Either way, he wants you to pray, and keep your head on a swivel!

Ephesians 6:18–20

¹⁸ 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 Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, 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.

What is the theme of verse 18?

Commentary

Ephesians 6:18

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 Lord's people.

On one occasion, I stood on a chair seat to make a theological point that needed to stick in people's memory. Perhaps the reason it worked is that this was the only stunt they ever saw from me during a sermon. Paul could not do that from house arrest in Rome, but he was not without his own bag of tricks — rhetorical methods. In verse 18 he uses nine Greek words that each begin with the Greek letter pi (English “p”). Think “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,” but that gives only six words beginning with “p.”

Prayer: a simple act made hard

What was Paul emphasizing? Prayer. Prayer about everything. You can find a lot of ideas about prayer from various sources, and the Bible verses that teach about prayer are scattered throughout the Scriptures. If you strip away the non-essentials, *prayer is talking with God.*

At this point, some very smart people might throw up their hands and say, “There's more to it than that!” They have many concerns: that you will not show God the proper respect; that you will not say things using proper phrases like “in Jesus name” and “in the power of the Spirit” and “amen.” They want you to use the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

So, you are about to go in for a job interview, and you want to ask God to help you. I say go ahead! But the ACTS advocate says not so fast; first you must go through the proper steps so that God will hear your prayer and grant it.

Plus, of course, there is posture. You are sitting in that waiting area for your job interview, praying. You did fold your hands — right? And close your eyes? Is silent prayer okay, or must it be spoken? More rules.

I oppose all rules about prayer. They may have been well-intended, but their effect is to burden communication with God. In my defense, consider Peter walking on the water but beginning to sink (Matthew 14:22–33). Did Peter keep any of the alleged rules? No! He simply said, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30). Someone may say that is only one example. True, but check out the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43). He didn’t fold his hands because they were nailed to a cross! Nor did he jump through any other magical hoops, but his sincere faith matched the gracious acceptance of Christ, and he joined Christ in paradise that day.

Prayer is talking with God. Just do it!

Is there anything you need to say to God right now? Even if it has been a while since you spoke to him, he is listening!

More on prayer

Verse 18 has more to tell us, but first consider Snodgrass’s insightful words about prayer: “A theology of prayer also assumes that life is not predetermined, that our concerns are important to God, and that God cares and responds to us.”⁵⁴ Otherwise, why pray?

Snodgrass expresses some exasperation with the NIV’s translation in that it makes a paragraph break at verse 18 and also promotes two Greek participles (“praying” and “being alert”) into commands (“pray” and “be alert”).⁵⁵ Why is this a matter of contention? Because both decisions break the connection between taking up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (verse 17) and the very necessary *means* of making them effective through prayer and alertness (verse 18).⁵⁶ Remember that this is spiritual warfare, and the translators have no independent knowledge of such matters to justify these choices. They are trying to make short, active sentences. That’s a worthy cause, but not if it changes the revealed theology!

The final phrase “always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” combines three elements: (1) persistence, (2) prayer, and (3) the object of such prayer (“all the Lord’s people”). You may not like what I’m going to say next: *those who belong to the Lord are our first priority in prayer*, and not everyone belongs to the Lord. This is one verse about prayer, and it does not represent a comprehensive picture. But it says what it says, and I think we must at least admit that as Christians we are not very strategic about our prayers. Once again, I

⁵⁴ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 360.

⁵⁵ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 344.

⁵⁶ The NET Bible Notes for Ephesians 6:18 agree that these are participles expressing means, not commands, yet their translation makes them into new commands as the NIV has done!

point to Galatians 6:10, which says, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Similar theology.

Ephesians 6:19–20

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, 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.

As a direct application of his encouragement to pray for all who belong to Christ, Paul offers his own situation for ongoing prayer. Remember that Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial before Caesar (Nero in this case). It is likely that Paul may have known little about the timing — an hour away or a year away. Even if he had known, someone like Nero could change the time at any moment without a reason or an explanation.

It may be hard for Americans to understand why Paul might need prayer to speak “fearlessly” (verse 19) when his moment came before Nero. Our social media may be the most fearless (foolish?) communication in world history! But people were no more free to speak their minds in Nero’s Rome than in today’s China. Hoehner clarifies Paul’s situation by reminding us that: (1) the Romans considered the Christians as a sect of the Jews, (2) the Jews considered the Christians heretics, and (3) Paul was teaching that the assembly of believers was *a new entity* composed of both Jews and Gentiles in one united group.⁵⁷

Since the Jews had fought to gain the right to worship God and not the Emperor, Christianity had cover so long as it sheltered within Judaism. But as soon as the Romans figured out that Christianity was not a subset of Judaism, then the Christians would be under the same pressure as all others to participate in Emperor worship. Both Paul and his Jewish accusers were bound — for different reasons — to make the truth known about the Christians. So, Paul was obligated to argue a view that endangered his own life!

What was it that Paul wanted to boldly and openly make known? He says it is “the mystery of the gospel” (verse 19). Remember that the Greek word *mysterion* means “(God’s) secret.”⁵⁸ Paul revealed in Ephesians 2–3 that this secret is the union of believing Jews and Gentiles in one body.

The irony in verse 20 is that Paul is an ambassador — thus deserving of honor and diplomatic immunity so that he could speak without fear — but he is in chains. Eventually Paul would lose his life to Roman justice, just as Jesus had. But Jesus will have the last word, not Caesar!

⁵⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 863.

⁵⁸ BDAG-3, *mysterion*, (God’s) secret, q.v.

Day 3: First-century prayer group

Barry Applewhite, author

I have good news and bad news. First, the good news: Christ Fellowship has a wonderful group of people who pray for needs made known to them. The bad news is that they cannot read minds; you have to actually request prayer and (optionally) provide information about the need. There is a link for prayer on the CFhome.org webpage, and you can use it to reach the page for making a request.

Ephesians 6:21–22

²¹ 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.

Why is Paul sending Tychicus?

Commentary

In our age of near-instant communications — for good and for ill! — we may find it hard to imagine sending a written letter by way of a single messenger. Hoehner names Augustus as the Emperor who revised the Roman postal system to have one messenger accept a letter for delivery, carry the letter throughout its journey, and then deliver it to the recipients.⁵⁹ Paul names his messenger as Tychicus, giving him high praise in Christ (verse 21).

Paul has requested prayer, and he wants those prayers to have a solid basis in factual information (verse 21). That is one value of insisting that Christians deal with one another with truth. Paul also sends a mature believer who can encourage the Ephesians in their shared faith.

Who have you encouraged in their walk of faith or in their service to the assembly at Christ Fellowship?

⁵⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 869.

Day 4: Peace, love, faithfulness, grace

Barry Applewhite, author

When we are parting from someone, either in person or by digital communications, we quite naturally exchange wishes for the well-being of the other person. Even the simple “goodbye” originally meant “God be with you.” In a former age, most people understood that such parting words constituted a prayer to God (for Christians and Jews) or to the gods (for Greeks, Romans, and other pagans). Such statements are a blessing — even when we try to make them low-key — and they recognize that life is both dangerous and unpredictable.

Ephesians 6:23–24

²³ Peace be with you, dear brothers and sisters, and may God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you love with faithfulness. (NLT) ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love. (NIV)

Who is named twice in these two verses?

Commentary

Ephesians 6:23

Peace be with you, dear brothers and sisters, and may God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you love with faithfulness. (NLT)

This verse offers one of those rare instances when the NLT’s tendency toward paraphrase proves useful. Here I have used the NLT in place of the NIV because it translates the Greek noun *pistis* with its primary meaning “faithfulness”⁶⁰ rather than its secondary meaning “faith.”⁶¹ Of course, the peace made possible by Christ between believing Jews and Gentiles, giving access to God to both, has been one of the great themes of Ephesians (2:14–18).

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God has made possible our faithfulness to him. In this, we are imitating Christ and fulfilling Ephesians 5:1. Unfortunately, in the history of western Christianity, faith has been associated with mere assent to certain doctrines. Faith in the doctrines of the Christian faith is a good thing, but it must result in the good works designed by God for us to carry out (Ephesians 2:10). Faithfulness is the living expression of our faith in Christ.

How would you evaluate your own faithfulness to Christ? Take into account such actions as giving to the assembly, participating (faithfully!) in worship services and life group, and showing Christ’s love to others.

⁶⁰ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 364. Also: Larkin, *Ephesians*, 170.

⁶¹ BDAG-3, *pistis*, faithfulness, q.v.

Ephesians 6:24

Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

When we looked at Ephesians 1:6, I defined “grace” by considering the context and said that grace was all that God “has freely given us in the One he loves,” meaning all that God has given us in *Christ*. As far as I am concerned, that is a good working definition for grace, but the standard lexicon says the Greek noun *charis* means: “practical application of goodwill, (*a sign of*) favor, *gracious deed/gift, benefaction*” (emphasis original).⁶² The word has other meanings, but that one fits this context.

So, in this case Paul is praying for God to give more gifts or favors to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be fabulous to leave Ephesians right there, but the NIV (followed closely by other English versions) adds “with an undying love.” They do so because there is a final prepositional phrase in the Greek text: *en aphtharsia*. The longer word is the Greek noun *aphtharsia* which means: “incorruptibility [not subject to decay], immortality.”⁶³

Now I admit that loving “our Lord Jesus Christ *with undying love*” is such an exalted phrase that I would like for the verse to mean that. What a cool way to end Ephesians! But that translation is a real stretch — a bridge too far. Why do I say that? You have to reach too far from where Paul placed the final phrase, and you have to make the verse contain two forms of the word “love,” contrary to the original text.

Snodgrass offers the following literal translation that takes the Greek text in word order: “**Grace be with all those loving our Lord Jesus Christ in immortality.**”⁶⁴ Snodgrass then shows four ways that this final prepositional phrase has been taken, and he prefers the third way to the others:

- Connect the final words to “loving,” as the NIV has done, but you also have to add “love” at the end;
- Connect the final words to “grace” as the New English Bible has done [ending with “grace and immortality”], but that repeats “grace” at the end;
- Connect the words to “the Lord Jesus Christ,” emphasizing that Christ already reigns in immortality;
- See the words as a general expression of the eternal consequences of the gospel.⁶⁵

God’s grace does not depend on *our* “undying love” (NIV). That phrase that would mean something if applied to God’s love, but, when applied to ours, it is just romantic poetry. Ending with “the Lord Jesus Christ in immortality” works just fine, without gymnastics. Baugh prefers to end with “in incorruptibility,” and he also sees no sense in the long reach for some other connection point.⁶⁶ As we show our love for Christ by living for him, we receive even more grace from God. All honor to our gracious God!

62 BDAG-3, *charis*, gift, q.v. (meaning 3).

63 BDAG-3, *aphtharsia*, immortality, q.v.

64 Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 364.

65 Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 365.

66 Baugh, *Ephesians*, 576.

Day 5: Applying what you have learned

Barry Applewhite, author

There are three reasons that Christians in general don't pray more: (1) prayer has been burdened down with many rules, (2) they have sinned and feel uncomfortable or unwelcome before God, and (3) they don't realize how important communicating with God really is.

Ephesians 6:18 describes us praying at all times for all those who believe. How do the rate of your prayers and the scope of your prayers compare to that? What step could you take immediately to make a needed change?

Christ Fellowship has a prayer group that you can join, and your life group may circulate prayers within the group.

What would it take for you to join a prayer group that receives e-mail and prays for needs? If your life group leaders have no margin for posting prayer needs, what would prevent you from doing so for them?

Paul was an ambassador-in-chains for Christ, but most of us are not hindered by such limits.

What kind of ambassador for Christ are you? How can you become a better one?

God's grace combines his kindness, compassion, and love. First, we receive grace, and then we pass it on.

How has God's grace in Jesus Christ changed your life?

Resources for prayer

Ken Stoneking, Pastor for Small Groups

Books:

A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World by Paul E. Miller

Prayer: Experiencing Awe & Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller

RightNow Videos:

Prayer by Matt Chandler

The Sacred Echo: Why is Prayer So Mysterious? by Margaret Feinberg

Classes/Seminars/Additional Resources:

Online Prayer Form at <http://www.CFhome.org/ministries/pray/need-prayer/>

The Christian Life Academy Course, Issue 7

Note to the reader: This week of lessons is a reprint. On Sunday, October 8, 2017, Pastor Jaime Gonzalez will bring the message, and we will welcome back Senior Pastor Bruce Miller.

Walk by the Spirit

Week 5 | Galatians 5:16-24

Jaime Gonzales, author

Do you desire to spiritually grow in your walk with Christ? Well, let's start walking!

Walking is an elemental skill for humans. It's how we get from one place to another. Perhaps because it's such an important part of who we are, walking has become a dominant metaphor in almost every culture in the world. For example, to describe the passage of time we say that the past is "behind" us and the future "ahead." It's as if we are walking from the past to the future. In politics, politicians "run" for office. In leadership, the entire concept of "leader" derives from following someone who is going somewhere. We describe the feeling of trying very hard not to upset or offend someone as "walking on eggshells." We even use the phrase, "walked into my heart" to describe the love and affection a person has for someone else. We probably use the walking metaphor on a daily basis more than we realize.

One of the most common metaphors found in the writings of the apostle Paul is also that of walking. In fact, except for the letter he wrote to Philemon, this metaphor appears in all of Paul's letters. From the itineraries of the book of Acts alone, scholars have estimated that Paul traveled nearly ten thousand miles by foot during his ministry years as he spread the gospel of Jesus from city to city.⁶⁷ It's probably safe to assume that his use of this metaphor arose from his vast personal experience!

This week we are going to focus on one particular use of the walking metaphor to convey the essential spiritual truth of "Walking in the Spirit." We are going to pay close attention to Galatians 5 and Romans 8 where Paul instructs believers in Christlike behavior and insists that it can only be developed by following the Holy Spirit's lead and walking in step with him. Paul uses the phrase "Walk by the Spirit" to show that living a Spirit-led life is the only way to live the Christian life, and nothing else works. We'll look at the need to walk by the Spirit, highlight the evidence of a life lived in the Spirit and conclude by remembering that Christ has given us the power to defeat sin.

It is my hope, that after spending time this week learning about what it looks like to walk in the Spirit, we will be able to experience a greater measure of the Spirit's fruitfulness in our lives manifested in practical ways.

⁶⁷ David J. Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999) 198.

Day 1 | First looks

Walking in the Spirit is the central metaphor for describing what it means to live as a Christian so let's begin our week with a general definition. What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

Contrary to what many people think, it is not simply trying to do the right thing. *Walking by the Spirit in our daily life requires yielding to and obeying the desires produced by the Holy Spirit because they are stronger than the desires produced by our flesh.* (Don't worry, we'll spend the rest of the week unpacking that statement!)

Today we want to read through our central passages and get a general sense of Paul's teaching. As you read, make note of two actions. In both Galatians 5:16–24 and Romans 8:1–17, Paul uses two Greek verbs, *peripateō* (walk) and *ágō* (lead) metaphorically to describe following the lead of the Holy Spirit so we can live according to God's will.⁶⁸ Notice those words in the Scripture below.

Galatians 5:16–24

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Romans 8:1–17

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰

68 For all uses of *peripateo* (walk) by Paul see Rom 6:4; 8:1, 4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:3; 7:17; 2 Cor 4:2; 5:7; 10:2–3; 12:18; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17 (2x); 5:2, 8, 15; Phil. 3:17–18; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1, 12; 2 Thess. 3:6, 11.

But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Why do you think that Paul compared the Christian life to walking?

In what ways does the flesh set its desires against the Spirit? In what ways does the Spirit set His desires against the flesh?

What are some of the risks of not learning how to walk in the Spirit?

Prayer for the week

Father, thank you for giving me the Holy Spirit who came to reside within me on the day that I trusted in your son Jesus Christ. I thank you that your Spirit produces in me desires for the things that are of you and that those desires are stronger than my fleshly desire. Thank you for empowering me to live according to your will. Help me to moment-by-moment and day-by-day yield to and obey the Spirit’s leading in my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 2 | Walk by the Spirit

Hearing the phrase, “walk by the Spirit,” probably evokes different sentiments for different people. However, Paul is not talking to “super-Christians” or only the leaders in the church or people of the “charismatic” persuasion. Rather, he’s addressing these words to everyone who is a follower of Christ. That’s you and me! Every believer needs to learn how to walk by the Spirit.

Today we’re focusing on Galatians 5:16–18. Previously, in Galatians 3:2–3, 7–14 and 4:6, Paul had unfolded the foundational truth that each believer begins their new life in Christ by being born of the Spirit. In other words, the human nature, with which all of us are born, cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless it is changed. This change is called being “born again.”⁶⁹ The moment you trusted in Jesus Christ as your savior, the Spirit of God created a new heart in you and you were born of the Spirit. You received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You now have the Spirit who enables you to commune with and worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

What this also means is that the Holy Spirit is establishing himself as the new ruling principle in your life. Through the Holy Spirit’s empowerment, you are being transformed and growing in Christlikeness. So, Paul’s main argument of Galatians 5 is: *Since we live by the Spirit, let us **keep in step** (walk) with the Spirit.* Believers should live a Spirit-controlled life in all its details from waking up in the morning until going to sleep at night. As we’ll see, Romans 8 echoes this idea.

Galatians 5:16–18

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Romans 8:5–8

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

Interestingly, Paul never actually tells us how to walk in the Spirit; he simply states what it does and doesn’t look like. The believer who is walking by the Spirit looks like someone who has “their mind set on what the Spirit desires,” and as a result the fruit of the Spirit is present in their lives (Gal. 5:22–24). But, the believer who is not walking by the Spirit looks like someone who has “their mind set on what the flesh desires” (Rom. 8:5), gratifying the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). As a result, they produce “the works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19–21). (We’ll talk more about the works of the flesh tomorrow in Day 3 of our study.)

⁶⁹ John 3:5–8: Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

The Greek verb for walk, *peripatéō*, in its wider usage means “to walk around after someone or to walk in a particular direction.”⁷⁰ Paul’s Galatian audience would have clearly understood this concept whether they were of Jewish or Gentile descent. In those days, a Jewish disciple would follow a rabbi. The whole point of being a disciple was to follow and learn from the rabbi by hearing his words, observing his way of life and obeying his teaching. The end goal was to become like the rabbi. The Greeks had a similar idea. During the days of Aristotle, his students were known as *Peripatetics* because of their habit of following their teacher around from place to place listening to and obeying his teachings.⁷¹

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit and that he would “teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:26) and he would also “guide you into all the truth,” (John 16:13). For the Christian, to walk by the Spirit means to follow our teacher’s leading. We are to be led by and keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

The battle within

We should pay close attention to the conflict within us because we constantly resist the desire to walk by the Spirit. According to Paul, the greatest threat to walking by the Spirit is “the flesh.” What is the flesh? Paul says in Romans 6:6, “*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*” In other words, in Christ we have been freed from the penalty of sin and delivered from the power of sin; however, we are not immediately delivered from the presence of sin. The presence of sin in your flesh manifests itself as inclinations and desires that entice you away from God. Deliverance from the presence of sin will not take place until you are finally in heaven in the presence of the Lord.

In the meantime, the flesh is still hanging around. As believers, we are at conflict with the desires of the flesh. Paul says in Romans 8:7–8, “the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. Paul also says that the flesh produces death (Rom 8:6) and those who live according to the flesh will die (Rom. 8:13). So, as believers we are in conflict with the flesh!

But there is hope in Christ! We can bring these desires of the flesh under the Holy Spirit’s influence. “*Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh*” is a promise. Those who yield to the Spirit daily have the promise that they do not have to gratify their fallen human nature.

Notice that the apostle Paul doesn’t say we won’t *have* the desires of the flesh when we walk in the Spirit, but that we won’t *carry out* those fleshly desires. Having the Holy Spirit within you doesn’t remove the desires of the flesh. However, as believers indwelt with God’s Spirit, we don’t have to succumb to the desires of the flesh. As we daily yield to the Spirit’s leading in our life, the desires produced by the Spirit will be stronger than the desires produced by the flesh.

Part of the problem with fighting the flesh is having a casual attitude toward sin. Every day believers face the world’s temptations, Satan’s temptations, and the flesh’s temptation. So long as we remain in this present life, we never outgrow or transcend the spiritual conflict Paul is describing in this passage.⁷² Every follower of

70 Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994) 386.

71 Id.

72 Ibid., 387.

Christ is in this spiritual war. As believers, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of sitting this one out. The way you deal with sin is not simply by saying “no” to the flesh, but by also saying “yes” to the Spirit’s work.⁷³

Before you were saved, there was no war raging within you. Your will was enslaved by your fleshly desires. All you could do was follow the fleshly desires because the flesh is going to act like the flesh. So, what does salvation in Jesus Christ bring? It brings deliverance from the bondage of those fleshly desires, and freedom is found in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

We can conclude today’s study in the word with an illustration. Consider the law of gravity versus the law of aerodynamics. It is a fact that the law of gravity is always in place. You will never eliminate gravity on this earth. But when you get on an airplane, a greater law takes effect. The Wright brothers didn’t eradicate gravity with their flying machine, they simply rendered it inoperative. The law of aerodynamics overcomes the law of gravity. Now, if the greater law ever stops working, (e.g. the engine goes out, a wing is damaged) the plane will tumble to the ground because gravity still exists.

The law of God’s Spirit within us is what enables us to overcome the law of sin. When we are walking in the Spirit, we will not bring to fulfillment the desires of the flesh.

How does Galatians 5:16-18 encourage you today?

Are there any areas in your life where you are walking in the flesh instead of walking in the Spirit?

How does your thought-life relate to overcoming sin?

What are the practical implications of walking in the Spirit?

73 David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians*, edited by Daniel L. Akin (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014).

Day 3 | Observe the obvious

So far Paul has talked in general terms about life in the Spirit. He has assured his readers that the Spirit will enable them to resist the desires of the flesh. So, this begs the question, how do we know if we are walking by the Spirit? Paul answers this question in today's passage by giving two contrasting lists. Really, it's not too difficult to tell! Paul contrasts the virtues of walking by the Spirit with the vices of the flesh. It is important to note that these lists are not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, they provide an objective basis for evaluation, so we can determine whether we are living to gratify the desires of the flesh or living by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:19–23

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Paul first addresses the works of the flesh. Most scholars divide the list of the “works of the flesh” into four areas:

1. sexual sins: “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery”
2. religious sins: “idolatry and witchcraft”
3. relational sins: “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy”
4. self-indulgent sins: “drunkenness and orgies”

The works of the flesh

The “works of the flesh” are what you do when you “gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

Sexual sins. Paul begins his list of vices with sexual sins. It is of great note that Paul mentions sexual sins first in his other lists of vices as well (cf. Rom. 1:24; 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:3–5, and Col. 3:5). Sexual sins are a major problem because their pull on the flesh is intense. Their prominence in these lists speaks to this. Sexual sins affect many others, not just the one sinning. It dishonors those made in the image of God. It violates God's pure plan for marriage.

Religious sins. Most of us would never consider ourselves as “idolators.” However, we cannot consider idolatry simply in terms of backward, pagan rituals that pay homage to a block of wood or a piece of stone. Idolatry is a much deeper heart issue than that. At its core, idolatry is giving reverence, homage and worship to created things instead of to the Creator. Many of us, living in suburban America, value our possessions, pleasures and prestige, more than we value God. That's idolatry!

Relational sins. Now, Paul moves on to show how the flesh manifests itself in the area of relationships. In the list of vices, the largest number of manifestations of the flesh (eight total) is seen in conflicts within our relationships. They run the gamut from hatred to actions of discord and jealousy that result in factions. Loving others is not easy. When the flesh controls us, interpersonal problems are the result.⁷⁴

Self-indulgent sins. Paul concludes his list with two terms that refer to the wild drinking parties held in honor of pagan gods, particularly the god Bacchus. Drunkenness and orgies were part of pagan culture; they still are.⁷⁵ Drunkenness implies a complete lack of self-control in response to fleshly desires.

Paul ends the list of vices with a warning: “I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21). Paul is not denying the reality of our struggle with the flesh. However, he is warning his readers that if you are living under the rule of the flesh, and as such, the works of the flesh are significantly manifested in your life, and you feel no guilt, then you should examine yourself to see if you really have been born again of the Spirit (See 2 Cor. 13:5). What a sobering challenge!

The fruit of the Spirit

After listing the fifteen works of the flesh, Paul now turns our attention to consider the contrasting graces of the Spirit-control life. Verses 22 and 23 say, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*” As we consider the fruit of the spirit, there are several key observations that need to be made.

First, this fruit is truly a character sketch of Christ. A reading of the Gospels would show us that this fruit was seen in the life of Jesus. Earlier in his letter, Paul expressed his desire to see Christ “formed” in the Galatian believers (4:19).

Secondly, the fruit of the Spirit is only produced by the Spirit as a result of our union with Christ. Jesus said in John 15:15, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Why does Paul refer to the “*fruit* of the Spirit” instead of the “works of the Spirit” to match “works of the flesh”? New Testament scholar Douglas Moo argues that the reason is because Paul wants to avoid giving any impression that what the Spirit produces is *our work*. It is not our work; it is *his fruit*.⁷⁶ What we do when we walk by the Spirit is simply fulfill the desires produced by the Spirit. Therefore, these character qualities are a result of living and being led by the Spirit.

Thirdly, producing this fruit takes time and a constantly yielding to the Spirit. Only weeds pop up overnight. The Spirit’s fruit is grown over time. This fruit is the outgrowth of a life that is learning daily dependence on the Holy Spirit. When we are walking in the Spirit, the fruit that is produced will be evident in our relationship to God, others, and ourselves. The first three moral qualities — love, joy, and peace — describe our relationship with God. The next three — forbearance, kindness, and goodness — describe how we relate to one another. And the last three moral qualities — faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control — describe our personal responsibilities and daily walk.

74 Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999) 65.

75 G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) Gal. 5:19.

76 Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) 363.

What struck you the most in the section on “The works of the flesh”?

What lesson or reminder did you need the most in the section on “The fruit of the Spirit”?

Day 4 | Remember the good news

Paul concludes his two lists of *the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit* with a summary statement about putting to death the sinful flesh (v. 24) and living by the Spirit (v. 25). The death of the sinful flesh opens the way for the life of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:24–26

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Bible scholar Walter Hansen rightly points out that in Galatians 2:19 and 6:14, Paul says Christians have been crucified with Christ, but here in 5:24 he says believers themselves *have crucified* the flesh. The verb is in the aorist tense which means that the action happened at a specific point in time. But notice also the verb is in the active voice. That simply means that this is not something that is done to you but something that is done by you.

When did that happen? The day you trusted in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and were born again of the Spirit.⁷⁷ Although you still experience the temptation to sin, the good news is that because you belong to Jesus, you are no longer dominated or controlled by the flesh. You and the flesh have parted ways. At the cross, Christ won the decisive battle against sin. Therefore, while Paul does not lay out a formula on *how* to walk by the Spirit, he has told us that living the Spirit-controlled life is not any different from how we began the Christian life — by the Spirit. Because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, walking in the Spirit is simply living out what happened to us the moment we trusted in Christ for salvation when we crucified the flesh.

So, here’s the question: did you die to yourself today? At all? In other words, did you live in light of the reality that your flesh has been crucified with its affections and lusts? Walking by the Spirit begins as a day-by-day, moment-by-moment decision; we die to ourselves (our flesh).

Romans 8:12–13

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

When a man was crucified, he did not die quickly. He could actually linger for days before expiring. In the same way, the flesh does not die quickly. The flesh, crucified at salvation, desires to climb down from the cross and be nurtured back to life. We have to treat the flesh the same way Jesus was treated at Calvary — put it to death.

The basic demand of Christian discipleship is that we take up our cross daily and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). Scholar Timothy George rightly states that Paul stretches this metaphor further by saying that “we must not only take up our cross and walk with it, but actually see that the execution takes place.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Hansen, *Galatians*, Galatians 5:22.

⁷⁸ George, *Galatians*, 405.

John Brown describes the continual putting to death of the flesh with all its sinful passions and desires in this way: “Crucifixion . . . produced death not suddenly but gradually. . . . True Christians do not succeed in completely destroying it (that is the flesh) while here below; but they have fixed it to the cross and they are determined to keep it there till it expires.”⁷⁹

Galatians 5:25 says, “*Since we live by the Spirit, let us **keep in step** with the Spirit.*” The phrase “keep in step” is in reference to marching in line or keeping in step as a soldier falls into formation and follows his leader.⁸⁰ Keeping in step is a walk that is ordered by the Spirit, and we, as his followers, are to keep in step with him. What a privilege to have the Holy Spirit lead us! Falling behind, because we get distracted by the desires of the flesh, would be devastating to our walk with the Lord.

What is the good news in this passage?

How might you crucify the flesh?

In what ways can you fall behind or become distracted and get out of step with the Spirit?

79 Id.

80 Ibid., 406.

Day 5 | Applying what you have learned

This week we considered what it looks like to walk by the Spirit. We've seen how we must continually walk by the Spirit. We learned that walking by the Spirit is what we do when the desires produced by the Spirit are stronger than the desires produced by the flesh.

How can you begin to cultivate a greater sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in your life?

What are some spiritual habits that will allow you to learn the desires of God?

Walking in the Spirit is the central metaphor for describing what it means to live as a Christian. Life lived according to the Spirit is not simply trying to do the right thing. Nor is it simply trying to live according to God's Law. Life as a Christian is cooperating with the Holy Spirit in a daily walk. According to Romans 8, what are the kinds of things you do when you walk in the Spirit?

- you set your mind on the things of the Spirit (v. 5–7)
- you put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (v. 13)
- you are led by the Spirit (v. 14)
- you know the Fatherhood of God by the Spirit (vv. 15–17)
- you hope in the Spirit (vv. 23–25)
- you pray in the Spirit (vv. 26–27).

Theologian J. I. Packer put it this way:

The Spirit works through means — through the objective means of grace, namely, Biblical truth, prayer, fellowship, worship, and the Lord's Supper, and with them through the subjective means of grace whereby we open ourselves to change, namely, thinking, listening, questioning oneself, examining oneself, admonishing oneself, sharing what is in one's heart with others, and weighing any response they make. . . . Habit forming is the Spirit's ordinary way of leading us into holiness. . . . Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control are all of them habitual . . . ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.⁸¹

81 J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1984) 90.

What is your next step? How might the application of this week's passage change your life?

What spiritual discipline can you begin to practice next in order to help you walk in the Spirit?

A network diagram background consisting of a complex web of thin grey lines connecting various grey circular nodes of different sizes. The nodes are scattered across the page, with a higher density of connections in the upper and lower portions.

LIVE BY DESIGN

The book of Ephesians answers questions that are vital to everyone who has committed their life to Jesus Christ: what does God expect from me, and how can I live this new life in Christ? While giving our allegiance to Jesus is essential, the greater part of our lives is spent learning to follow Jesus ever more closely.

Ephesians 6 reveals how who we are in Christ must reshape our most vital relationships to match our relationship to Christ instead of conforming to a lost culture. To live by design requires a new design principle — new goals to aim for!

Our model and example is Jesus Christ, who teaches us not only how our relationships must change but also about our need for God's mighty strength and for prayer. The need to use that strength to block spiritual attacks by the evil one adds urgency to these changes.

Live by Design completes the design for following Jesus that God wants us to live by.