



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 14: Defining Family Matters Part II - Ephesians 5

- March 23rd (Baptism), 30th
- April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

The Goal of Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:1 Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST FOR THESE TO BE THE ANSWERS?

- **REDEMPTION 1:7** (Salvation, Restoration)
- **DIVINE INTENTION for the human race 1:3-14** (God's plan for us)
- **GRACE 1:2** (God's favor that we never can earn)
- **PREDESTINATION 1:4-5** [The Tree DNA in the seed and...]
- **RECONCILIATION 2:1-21**
- **UNION WITH CHRIST 2:1-21**

Week 1: Welcome to Ephesus – Understanding the History

Week 2: Understanding the Culture of the Time: Individual Self/Collective Self

Week 3: Understanding JC Headship of the Church. How/When/Why of being a member of a church.

Week 4: His Genesis – Predestination, What happened before Genesis and how it affects us today

Week 5: Ephesians 2:11-22 Being One – Not Two

Week 6: Paul's life with God.

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm (Intercession)

Week 8: Angelology

Week 9: Ephesians 3 – Intercession

Week 10: Equation for Unity = Humility + Gentleness + Patience + Forbearing + Love

Week 11: Victory & Gifts of the Trinity

Week 12: Family Dynamics Part I

Week 13: The Kinship Model of Community – Pr. Robin HOW AM I RELATED TO THE BODY OF CHRIST?

Week 14: Family Dynamics Part II

TOPICS: Conflict (plain unafraid talk 4) Controlling the tongue (4). Sanctification (4). Boundaries/Necessary Endings (5), Sexual impurity/Covetous (5). Submission (5). Husband/Wives (5). Children and Parents (6), Armor of God (6). Reciprocity. FAMILY MATTERS.

Ephesians 5:1-4

C. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Self centered:

³ A. *But sexual immorality [fornication (porneia)] and all impurity (akatharsia) or covetousness [I deserve, I want, I need]*

B. **must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.**

⁴ A. *Let there be no filthiness [obscenity] nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place,*

God centered:

C. but instead let there be thanksgiving.

But the reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex, and are either ashamed or afraid of it, but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God's good gift, which we do not want to see cheapened. All God's gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving, rather than for joking. To joke about them is bound to degrade them; to thank God for them is the way to preserve their worth as the blessings of a loving Creator. STOTT



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Unity has been established. NOW...purity

Ephesians 5:1-4 Walk in Love

5 Therefore **be imitators of God**, as beloved children. **2** And ^(B)walk in love, ^(C)as Christ loved us and ^(D)gave himself up for us, a ^(E)fragrant ^(F)offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But ^(G)sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness ^(H)must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be ^(I)no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, ^(J)which are out of place, but instead ^(K)let there be thanksgiving.

I. BE IMITATORS OF GOD

a.) Walk in Love – Just like Christ did.

b.) Review: Thanksgiving (**the things we give thanks for**) are the reason for – putting off sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, coarse speech. And putting on purity – none of the above named amongst us (imitators of God).

THANKSGIVING

ASK: What do you give thanks to God for?

IMITATORS

Signs of an Imitator = Copycat? Clone? Impersonator?

1 Corinthians 11:1 - Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

3402 μιμητής [*mimetes* /mim·ay·tace/] n m. From 3401; TDNT 4:659; TDNTA 594; GK 3629; Seven occurrences; AV translates as “follower” seven times. **1** an imitator.¹

BE

1096 γίνομαι [*ginomai* /ghin·om·ahee/] v. A prolongation and middle voice form of a primary verb; TDNT 1:681; TDNTA 117; GK 1181; 678 occurrences; AV translates as “be” 255 times, “come to pass” 82 times, “be made” 69 times, “be done” 63 times, “come” 52 times, “become” 47 times, “God forbid + 3361” 15 times, “arise” 13 times, “have” five times, “be fulfilled” three times, “be married to” three times, “be preferred” three times, not translated 14 times, translated miscellaneous four times, and “vr done” twice. **1** to become, i.e. **to come into existence, begin to be, receive being.** **2** to become, i.e. to come to pass, happen. 2A of events. **3** to arise, appear in history, come upon the stage. 3A of men appearing in public. **4** **to be made, finished.** 4A of miracles, to be performed, wrought. **5** **to become, be made.**²

Walking so closely behind, you step where He steps. SHADOWING.

¹ Strong, J. (1995). In [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

² Strong, J. (1995). In [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.



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II. BECAUSE THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES

1.) CONSEQUENCE of: Judgement

Ephesians 5:5-7

⁵ For you may be sure of this, that [Ⓜ]everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous ([Ⓜ]that is, an idolater), **has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** ⁶ [Ⓜ]Let no one [Ⓜ]deceive you with empty words, for because of these things [Ⓜ]**the wrath of God comes upon [Ⓜ]the sons of disobedience.** ⁷ Therefore [Ⓜ]do not become partners with them;

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 – Flee Sexual Immorality

¹² “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined^[a] to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin^[b] a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

2.) CONSEQUENCE: FRUIT of Purity/Righteousness or....Exposed

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ for [Ⓜ]at one time you were [Ⓜ]darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. [Ⓜ]**Walk as children of light** ⁹ (for [Ⓜ]the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),¹⁰ and [Ⓜ]try to **discern what is pleasing to the Lord.** ¹¹ [Ⓜ]Take no part in the [Ⓜ]unfruitful [Ⓜ]works of darkness, but instead [Ⓜ]expose them. ¹² For [Ⓜ]it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when [Ⓜ]anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, [Ⓜ]“Awake, O sleeper, and [Ⓜ]arise from the dead, and [Ⓜ]Christ will shine on you.”

3.) CONSEQUENCE: Understanding the Will of the Lord (one step at a time) or...Foolishness

Ephesians 5:15-17

¹⁵ [Ⓜ]**Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, [What does wise walking look like in our life?]** ¹⁶ [Ⓜ]making the best use of the time, because [Ⓜ]the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what [Ⓜ]the will of the Lord is.



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4.) CONSEQUENCE: Be Being Filled with the Spirit (Results in: Worship. Thankfulness. Submission one to another.)

Ephesians 5:18-21

¹⁸ And ^(AB)do not get drunk with wine, for that is ^(AU)debauchery, but ^(AM)be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in ^(AB)psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ ^(AO)**giving thanks always** and for everything to God the Father ^(AP)in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ ^(AO)**submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

I.BE IMITATORS OF GOD

II.BECAUSE THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES: Judgment. Fruit. Understanding. Be Being Filled)

III. EXPRESS YOUR IMITATION OF GOD IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS (remember Kinship/Patriarchal)

A. In Marriage

Ephesians 5:22-33

Wives and Husbands [MARRIAGE ROLES, NOT SOCIETAL ROLES]

²² ^(AB)Wives, ^(AS)**submit** to your own husbands, ^(AD)**as** to the Lord.²³ For ^(AU)the husband is the head of the wife even as ^(AV)Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is ^(AW)Himself its Savior.²⁴ Now as the church **submits** (be subject to) to Christ, so also wives should **submit** ^(AX)in everything to their husbands.

Head: 1 Corinthians 11:3

³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife^[a] is her husband,^[b] and the head of Christ is God.

²⁵ ^(AV)Husbands, **love your wives**, as Christ loved the church and ^(AZ)gave Himself up for her,

1 Peter 3:7

⁷ Likewise, ^(A)husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker ^(B)vessel, since they are heirs with you^[a] of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

²⁶ that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by ^(BA)the washing of water ^(BB)with the word, ²⁷ so ^(BC)that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, ^(BD)without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.^[a] ²⁸ In the same way ^(BE)husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,³⁰ because ^(BF)we are members of his body. ³¹ ^(BG)“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and ^(BH)the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, ^(BL)let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she ^(BJ)respects her husband.



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Submit

5293 ὑποτάσσω [*hupotasso* /hoop·ot·as·so/] v. From 5259 and 5021; TDNT 8:39; TDNTA 1156; GK 5718; 40 occurrences; AV translates as “put under” six times, “be subject unto” six times, “be subject to” five times, “submit (one’s) self unto” five times, “submit (one’s) self to” three times, “be in subjection unto” twice, “put in subjection under” once, and translated miscellaneously 12 times. **1** to arrange under, to subordinate. **2** to subject, put in subjection. **3** to subject one’s self, obey. **4** to submit to one’s control. **5** to yield to one’s admonition or advice. **6** to obey, be subject. *Additional Information:* A Greek military term meaning “to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader”.

In non-military use, it was “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden”.³

We also must note that **the Greek word for submission, *hupotasso*, is written in the Greek middle voice, which means it is something that an individual imposes upon himself or herself.** It means to choose to yield to another, rather than demanding one’s own way. Submission remains the freewill right of the one choosing to yield. *It cannot be demanded from another individual or imposed upon one person by another.* When this occurs, it stops being *hupotasso* and becomes *domination*, which was an attitude Christ forbade His disciples to operate in with regard to one another (Matt. 23:10). Submission is not something that can be required or exacted from another person. J. Lee Grady

As

5613 ὡς, ὡσάν [*hos* /hoce/] adv. Probably from comparative from 3739; GK 6055 and together with Strongs 302 as GK 6056; 492 occurrences; AV translates as “as” 342 times, “when” 42 times, “how” 18 times, “as it were” 20 times, “about” 14 times, and translated miscellaneously 56 times. **1 as, like, even as, etc.**⁴

Head

2776 κεφαλή [*kephale* /kef·al·ay/] n f. From the primary kapto (in the sense of seizing); TDNT 3:673; TDNTA 429; GK 3051; 76 occurrences; AV translates as “head” 76 times. **1** the head, both of men and often of animals. Since the loss of the head destroys life, this word is used in the phrases relating to capital and extreme punishment. **2** metaph. anything supreme, chief, prominent. 2A of persons, master lord: of a husband in relation to his wife. 2B of Christ: the Lord of the husband and of the Church. 2C of things: the corner stone.⁵ (SOURCE)

- Is this usage of submit used to state it is to be this way or this is how it functions in our patriarchal society?
- Is Paul saying that a husband “covers” his wife? That a woman needs a man to cover her?
- Salvation runs through the headship of man for a family. THE MAN IS THE PREIST OF THEIR HOME?

The wife must let him make all the final decisions, what he says goes? Doesn’t this sound more like the patriarchal culture that already existed????

³ Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁴ Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁵ Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.



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CULTURAL CONTEXT [J.Lee Grady “10 Lies the Church Tells Women”]:

- Women were viewed as the property of either their fathers or their husbands.
- Men considered women to be ignorant (and most of them were, since men didn’t allow females to be educated).
- First-century Ephesus was steeped in Greek and Roman culture.
Greeks viewed women with disdain – no rights
“Athenian law of all periods tended to regard the wife as a veritable child, having the legal status of a minor compared to her husband,” Tucker writes. There were no laws against wife abuse. And if a man divorced his wife for any reason, she was economically stranded; the law gave her no recourse to claim any of his estate. Historian Ruth Tucker
- Romans taught that wives should stay in their place as inferiors.
The Roman philosopher Plutarch believed that women “ought to do their talking either to their husbands or through their husbands.” The famous statesman Cato once warned Roman leaders in a speech: “As soon as [women] begin to be your equals, they will become your superiors.”
- In New Testament times: Ruling your family =
Wife shut away in the house to do household chores,
Care for the family farm,
Sexual gratification
Have as many children as possible to help run the farm/business
If she died in childbirth, he found another wife.
If she didn’t please him in bed, he paid a younger woman outside the home to meet his sexual needs. If his wife shamed him, he beat her. If she dared to run away, he found her and beat her again.

B. JESUS REDEFINES:

1. FAMILY

- Church Family
- Nuclear Family – back to the Genesis model
- **THE CURSE OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN IS BROKEN = Yes or No?**
- Paul **came with a radically new model of family** that went to the very core of what was wrong with the world: “*Husbands, love your wives*” (Eph. 5:25).
Love their wives “as their own bodies” (v. 28). **This meant that men and women were equals.**
Gender prejudice – NO MORE
- And when Paul told the men to love their wives “as Christ also loved the church” (v. 25), he implied something even more revolutionary: **women are just as deserving of the grace of God as men are.**
- [No such thing as Priest of the home. Heresy, makes man women’s savior]



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But if this is true, then why does Paul still say the husband should function as the “head” of his wife? (See Ephesians 5:23.) Does this not give him the right to dominate her? **That depends on whether we want a Christian model of leadership or a worldly one.** J. Lee Grady

2. LEADERSHIP

a. Servanthood

Mark 9:34-35

But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

Mark 10:43-44 ESV

But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and...

Matthew 20:26-27 ESV

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and...

Matthew 23:11-12 ESV

The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and...

Luke 22:26 ESV

But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader...

b. Headship

Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, in her book *Good News for Women*, explains that there are really **two kinds of male headship** from which to choose.

- One is what she calls “life-giving headship,” which was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden when He took Eve out of Adam’s side.
- The opposing model is what she refers to as “ruling headship,” which began with the Fall when man and woman came under the curse of sin. Christian men today often view ruling headship as the godly way to lead a family—but it is the wrong model.

Writes Groothuis: “The biblical headship of the husband described in Ephesians 5 is redemptive, **in that it mitigates the effect of the fall which places the woman under male rule, and it helps to reinstate woman in her creational place of cultural responsibility alongside man.** In life-giving headship, the social privilege and power of maleness is shared by the husband with the wife, and utilized by him according to the terms of love rather than of male conquest and demand. By recognizing her personal and spiritual equality with him, and by putting all that he has and is at her disposal, a husband undoes the male rulership of the Fall and, by God’s grace, saves his wife from its effects.”

In other words, true biblical headship in marriage can be seen only when the husband:

(1) recognizes that his wife is his equal

(2) loves her sacrificially

(3) empowers his wife by allowing her to share his authority. (J. Lee Grady)

JUST LIKE JESUS DID FOR THE CHURCH

Head = Source



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The word used here for “head” in the Greek is *kephale*, which can be translated “source,” as the headwaters of a river are the source of the river. If Paul had meant to say, “The husband is the boss of the wife,” or “The husband is the leader of the wife,” he would have used the Greek word *archon*, which is often used in the New Testament to denote authority. Instead, he uses *kephale*, a rarer term. J. Lee Grady

Origin of woman:

Taken out of man (the source)

“And because she came from him, she as the wife enjoys a unique connection to him that cannot be paralleled by any other human relationship.” J. Lee Grady

Mutual Dependence

c. Priesthood

1 Peter 2:5-9

⁵ *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture:*

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and **whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.**”*

⁷ ***So the honor is for you who believe**, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”*

⁸ *and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Are we placing human relationships above our relationship with God when we enforce cultural roles instead of biblical ones?

Galatians 3:23-29

²³ *Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

**Ephesians 5 is not about hierarchy nor patriarchy;
it is about the challenge to equality that Christ brings.**



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WHAT HAPPENED IN THE GARDEN? CURSE FOREVER? EZER KENEGDO MEANS....?

Footnotes

- a. [Ephesians 5:27](#) Or *holy and blameless*

Cross references

- A. [Ephesians 5:1](#) : [\[ch. 4:32; Matt. 5:7, 48; Luke 6:36\]](#)
B. [Ephesians 5:2](#) : [Rom. 14:15; \[Col. 3:14\]; See John 13:34](#)
C. [Ephesians 5:2](#) : [See Rom. 8:37](#)
D. [Ephesians 5:2](#) : [See Rom. 4:25](#)
E. [Ephesians 5:2](#) : [See Gen. 8:21](#)
F. [Ephesians 5:2](#) : [Heb. 7:27; 9:14; 10:10, 12](#)
G. [Ephesians 5:3](#) : [1 Cor. 6:18; See Gal. 5:19](#)
H. [Ephesians 5:3](#) : [\[ver. 12; Ps. 16:4\]](#)
I. [Ephesians 5:4](#) : [ch. 4:29; \[Eccles. 10:13\]](#)
J. [Ephesians 5:4](#) : [\[Rom. 1:28\]](#)
K. [Ephesians 5:4](#) : [ver. 20](#)
L. [Ephesians 5:5](#) : [See 1 Cor. 6:9](#)
M. [Ephesians 5:5](#) : [Col. 3:5](#)
N. [Ephesians 5:6](#) : [See Matt. 24:4](#)
O. [Ephesians 5:6](#) : [Col. 2:8](#)
P. [Ephesians 5:6](#) : [Rom. 1:18; Col. 3:6](#)
Q. [Ephesians 5:6](#) : [ch. 2:2; \[1 Pet. 1:14\]](#)
R. [Ephesians 5:7](#) : [ch. 3:6](#)
S. [Ephesians 5:8](#) : [See ch. 2:1, 2](#)
T. [Ephesians 5:8](#) : [See Acts 26:18](#)
U. [Ephesians 5:8](#) : [Isa. 2:5; See Luke 16:8; John 12:35, 36](#)
V. [Ephesians 5:9](#) : [\[Gal. 5:22\]; See Rom. 7:4](#)
W. [Ephesians 5:10](#) : [1 Thess. 2:4; 5:21](#)
X. [Ephesians 5:11](#) : [See 1 Cor. 5:9](#)
Y. [Ephesians 5:11](#) : [Rom. 6:21](#)
Z. [Ephesians 5:11](#) : [Rom. 13:12](#)
AA. [Ephesians 5:11](#) : [Lev. 19:17; 1 Tim. 5:20](#)
BB. [Ephesians 5:12](#) : [\[ver. 3\]](#)
CC. [Ephesians 5:13](#) : [John 3:20, 21; \[ver. 9\]](#)
DD. [Ephesians 5:14](#) : [\[Isa. 51:17; 52:1; 60:1; Mal. 4:2\]; See Rom. 13:11](#)
EE. [Ephesians 5:14](#) : [Isa. 26:19](#)
FF. [Ephesians 5:14](#) : [Luke 1:78, 79](#)
GG. [Ephesians 5:15](#) : [Col. 4:5; \[Prov. 15:21\]](#)
HH. [Ephesians 5:16](#) : [\[See ver. 15 above\]; Col. 4:5; \[Prov. 15:21\]](#)
II. [Ephesians 5:16](#) : [ch. 6:13; Eccles. 12:1; Amos 5:13; Gal. 1:4](#)
JJ. [Ephesians 5:17](#) : [Rom. 12:2; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:18](#)
KK. [Ephesians 5:18](#) : [Prov. 20:1; 23:20, 31; 1 Cor. 5:11](#)
LL. [Ephesians 5:18](#) : [Titus 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:4](#)
MM. [Ephesians 5:18](#) : [\[Luke 1:15\]](#)
NN. [Ephesians 5:19](#) : [Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16; James 5:13](#)
OO. [Ephesians 5:20](#) : [Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3](#)
PP. [Ephesians 5:20](#) : [Heb. 13:15; \[John 14:13\]](#)



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- QQ.** [Ephesians 5:21](#) : [\[Phil. 2:3\]](#)
RR. [Ephesians 5:22](#) : [For ch. 5:22–6:9, see Col. 3:18–4:1](#)
SS. [Ephesians 5:22](#) : [See Gen. 3:16](#)
TT. [Ephesians 5:22](#) : [\[ch. 6:5\]](#)
UU. [Ephesians 5:23](#) : [1 Cor. 11:3](#)
VV. [Ephesians 5:23](#) : [See ch. 1:22, 23](#)
WW. [Ephesians 5:23](#) : [\[1 Cor. 6:13\]](#)
XX. [Ephesians 5:24](#) : [\[Col. 3:20, 22; Titus 2:9\]](#)
YY. [Ephesians 5:25](#) : [ver. 28, 33; \[1 Pet. 3:7\]](#)
ZZ. [Ephesians 5:25](#) : [ver. 2](#)
AAA. [Ephesians 5:26](#) : [Titus 3:5; \[Rev. 7:14\]](#)
BBB. [Ephesians 5:26](#) : [ch. 6:17; Heb. 6:5; See John 15:3](#)
CCC. [Ephesians 5:27](#) : [2 Cor. 11:2; See ch. 1:4](#)
DDD. [Ephesians 5:27](#) : [Song 4:7](#)
EEE. [Ephesians 5:28](#) : [ver. 25, 33](#)
FFF. [Ephesians 5:30](#) : [\[Gen. 2:23\]; See 1 Cor. 6:15](#)
GGG. [Ephesians 5:31](#) : [Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7, 8; Cited from Gen. 2:24](#)
HHH. [Ephesians 5:31](#) : [1 Cor. 6:16](#)
III. [Ephesians 5:33](#) : [ver. 25, 28](#)
JJJ. [Ephesians 5:33](#) : [1 Pet. 3:2, 6](#)

Be Imitators of God [AMP]

5 Therefore become imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]; ² and walk *continually* in love [that is, value one another—practice empathy and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others], just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God [slain for you, so that it became] a sweet fragrance.^(A) ³ But sexual immorality and all [moral] impurity [indecent, offensive behavior] or greed must not even be hinted at among you, as is proper among saints [for as believers our way of life, whether in public or in private, reflects the validity of our faith]. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse [obscene or vulgar] joking, *because* such things are not appropriate [for believers]; but instead speak of your thankfulness [to God]. ⁵ For be sure of this: no immoral, impure, or greedy person—for that one is [in effect] an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God [for such a person places a higher value on something other than God].

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty arguments [that encourage you to sin], for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience [those who habitually sin].^(B) ⁷ So do not participate *or* even associate with them [in the rebelliousness of sin]. ⁸ For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of Light [live as those who are native-born to the Light] ⁹ [for the fruit [the effect, the result] of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth], ¹⁰ trying to learn [by experience] what is pleasing to the Lord [and letting your lifestyles be examples of what is most acceptable to Him—your behavior expressing gratitude to God for your salvation]. ¹¹ Do not participate in the worthless *and* unproductive deeds of darkness, but instead expose them [by exemplifying personal integrity, moral courage, and godly character]; ¹² for it is disgraceful even to mention the things that such people practice in secret. ¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light [of God's precepts], for ^(C)it is light that makes everything visible. ¹⁴ For this reason He says,

"Awake, sleeper,

And arise from the dead,

And Christ will shine [as dawn] upon you *and* give you light."^(C)

¹⁵ Therefore see that you walk carefully [living life with honor, purpose, and courage; shunning those who tolerate and enable evil], not as the unwise, but as wise [sensible, intelligent, discerning people], ¹⁶^(D)making the very most of your time [on earth, recognizing and taking advantage of each opportunity and using it with wisdom and diligence], because the days are [filled with] evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish *and* thoughtless, but understand *and* firmly grasp what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is wickedness (corruption, stupidity), but be filled with the [Holy] Spirit *and* constantly guided by Him.^(D) ¹⁹^(D)Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, [offering praise by] singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Marriage Like Christ and the Church

²² Wives, be *subject* ^(D)to your own husbands, as [a service] to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church, Himself *being* the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives should be subject to their husbands in everything [respecting both their position as protector and their responsibility to God as head of the house].



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²⁵Husbands, love your wives [seek the highest good for her and surround her with a caring, unselfish love], just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶so that He might sanctify the church, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word [of God], ²⁷so that [in turn] He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy [set apart for God] and blameless. ²⁸Even so husbands should *andare* morally obligated to love their own wives as [being in a sense] their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own body, but [instead] he nourishes *and* protects and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members (parts) of His body. ³¹For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall be joined [and be faithfully devoted] to his wife, and the two shall become [Ⓜ]one flesh. [Ⓜ]³² This mystery [of two becoming one] is great; but I am speaking with reference to [the relationship of] Christ and the church. ³³However, each man among you [without exception] is to love his wife as his very own self [with behavior worthy of respect and esteem, always seeking the best for her with an attitude of lovingkindness], and the wife [must see to it] that she respects *and* delights in her husband [that she notices him and prefers him and treats him with loving concern, treasuring him, honoring him, and holding him dear].[Ⓜ]

NOTES: Genesis Pr. O

EZER KENEGDO

- e.g. ADAM&EVE

Genesis 1 overview

Gen. 1:26

“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over...all the earth

27

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male & female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Vs. 31a And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

Genesis 2 details

Gen 2:15

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** it and **take care** of it.

- ❖ Work: abad (aw-bad') to work, implied to serve, enslave, bond servant, compel, husbandman, keep, labor, bring to pass, servant, service, be wrought, worshipper.
- ❖ Take care: shamar (shaw-mar') to hedge about as with thorns, beware, be circumspect, **guard**, **protect**, attend to, take heed, mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, save, sure wait, watch.

Vs 16

“And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

Created Eve, as it was not good for man to be alone

Gen 3:1-6

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”’



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Vs. 4

You will not surely die” the serpent said to the woman. (5) For God knows that when u eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Vs 6

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

ASK: Why was the enemy in the garden to begin with?

Had Adam forsaken his duties?

Is Eve daft?

How could she fall for such an illusion? _____?

Genesis 1:2-20 Notice how creation becomes more intricate, more refined

What is its crescendo? Gen 2:21-23 (ezer kenegdo...helpmate, helper, companion, SUSTAINER BESIDE HIM)

{Deut. 33:26,29/ Ps 121:1-2/ Ps 20:1-2/ Ps 33:20/ Ps 115:9-11

Genesis answers the question: Who are we and where did we come from?

“It shows us our own place within the panorama of God’s purpose for the whole of His creation.” D. Atkinson

Scriptures view:

Other civilizations ancient writings do not include women. Women were viewed as property and not noteworthy. Notice the difference in scripture:

Gen 2-4	Eve
Gen 17-23	Sarah
Gen 16-21	Hagar
Gen 19	Lot’s Daughters
Gen 24-27	Rebekah
Gen 29-30	Rachel and Leah
Gen 34	Dinah
Gen 38	Tamar
Gen 39	Potiphar’s wife

The Lord’s documentation includes the good, the bad, the ugly...He desires reality.

READ NIV Gen 1:26-31

- Man and woman were both created in God’s image.
- Male and Female were created equal in nature.
- Women share in the responsibility and authority to create and care for society.

NEITHER COULD DO THIS ALONE.

Which is reinforced with detail in ...

READ NIV GEN 2:18-25

Gen 2: 7, 8, 19, Formed yatsar (yaw-tsar) press, mould into form. Especially as a potter.

Gen 2:23 Fashioned, made (built, insinuates piece by piece)

(.Ish and .ishshah are the words used to contrast the male and the female, respectively)



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▪ Vs. 18 “I will make a helper suitable for him.”

(Looking at the differences in design. Male: Provide and Protect. Female: Nurture and Develop)

What does helper mean? Let's look at help meet (two words)

HELP:

5828 עֲזָר [`ezer /ay·zer/] n m. From 5826; TWOT 1598a; GK 6469; 21 occurrences; AV translates as “help” 19 times, and “help meet” twice. 1 help, succour. 1A help, succour. 1B one who helps.

“Brings another to fulfillment.”

Hebrew word is ezer:

19 times in the Old Testament:

- 15 times it is used to refer to God helping people.

Ex 18:4 “My father’s God was my helper...”

Deut. 33:7 “Hear, O Lord, the cry of Judah; bring him to his people. With his own hand he defends his cause. Oh, be his help against his foes.”

Psalms 10:14 “But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.”

Psalms 33:20 “We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.”

Psalms 59:4 “ I have don o wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Aries to help me; look on my plight.”

- Four times it is used to refer to people helping people.
- Used of the Holy Spirit.

MEET: (Believe this is the only place these two words are combined)

(Heb. *kenegdo*, lit. “corresponding to what is in front of him”) occurs only here and in verse 20, emphasizing the commonality of the man and the woman.

The word “meet” is most commonly used in contemporary English as a verb meaning “to come face to face with”; “to come together”; “to join”; “to settle or fulfill.” In contemporary English the word occurs only as an adjective meaning “**suitable or right.**”

Philippians 1:7

Mark 7:27

Luke 15:32

Matthew 3:8

Col 1:12

2 Kings 10:3

Why did God decide not to make woman from the earth as he did Adam?

(some of the reason is still mystery...)

- Created to be inseparably linked to man. Completion. Corresponds perfectly. Companion. Fellowship (Gen. 2:23).

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”

(How important do you think fellowship is to the Lord? Heb 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage on another and all the more as you’re the Day approaching.”)



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use (how many men share their hearts with their buddies? This type of revelation is not 'safe'.)

WHY?

- With the creation of woman, the foundation for Christian marriage/Family is established.(v. 24). "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh."

God's design for man and woman are to be one. This is His definition of marriage. Not bestest friends or companions, but to be one.

This protects our sexuality. Keeps us whole and keeps us from the hurt of unhealthy sexual activity. (Abuse, rape, porn, molestation)

The development of husband and wife is assured.
The development of family is assured.
The development of community is assured.
The development of society is assured.

Women was created to nurture and develop.

Confirmed in Science: (In the Company of Women by Dr. Pat Heim)

Role of the Brain

Two hemispheres in the brain. Right Cortex and Left Cortex. Connect by corpus callosum. (bundles of fibers that connect the right and left hemispheres)

Taught: Right side of brain = artistic, emotional, abstract. Left = logic, cognitive, language
(Research done on male soldiers suffering from wartime injuries.)

The centers that control language and emotional responses can be found on both sides of the females brain.

Cortex for men has 13% more neurons, nerve cells, female has 13% more neuropil...specialized cell that allows the right and left side to communicate to each other.

The corpus callosum is much thicker in women which implies the two side spend more time communicating with each other.

Men's brains are more compartmentalized. Women's are more interactive.

Emotions and words are closely connected in the female brain.

Finnish pscy. Kaj Bjorkqvist

"Girls tend to form dyadic relationships." Two individual units, things, or people linked as a pair.

Girls seek community.

Identity is formed in community.

Reinforced by our role in nurturing the young.

Ancestors knew: We will need others for us (mom and kids) to survive.

Security is strived for.

Females are drawn to other females for strength.

Adjectives derived from Proverbs 31: A Woman of Strength

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Rare
Valuable
Trustworthy
Caring
Honorable
Supportive
Hardworking...Industrious...Provides
Organized
Purposeful
Just
Caring
Benevolent
Intelligent
Personal development
Wise
Business minded
Dignity
Beauty
Honor
Creative
Investor
Disciplined
Intune
Attentive
Gets results

(From Women's Study bible)

A Woman of Strength (Prov. 31:10–31)
manages her household well (Prov. 31:10–12) works willingly with her hands (Prov. 31:13) serves her household (Prov. 31:14, 15) invests wisely (Prov. 31:16) strengthens herself through proper care of her body and spirit (Prov. 31:17) uses her gifts consistently and creatively (Prov. 31:18, 19) gives generously to the poor (Prov. 31:20) protects her children (Prov. 31:21) dresses herself attractively (Prov. 31:22) represents her husband well (Prov. 31:23) uses her time and energies efficiently (Prov. 31:24) exhibits a spirit of optimism (Prov. 31:25) speaks with wisdom and kindness (Prov. 31:26) exemplifies faithfulness and excellence (Prov. 31:27–29) receives praise for her work (Prov. 31:30, 31)

Tradition: Human and fallible
Biblical truth: Divine and infallible

1 Cor 11: 11-12

"In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."

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(From Women's Study Bible)

FEMALE METAPHORS FOR GOD	
A Picture of God as:	Scripture Reference
Conceiving, carrying life in His womb, laboring, and giving birth	Job 38:8; Is. 42:14; John 3:6
Nursing mother	Num. 11:12; Ps. 131:1, 2; Is. 49:15; 1 Pet. 2:2, 3
Nurturing mother	Job 10:10–12; Is. 46:3, 4; Hos. 11:3, 4
Midwife	Ps. 22:9, 10; Is. 66:9
Mistress of the house	Ps. 123:2
Mother bear	Hos. 13:8
Mother eagle	Deut. 32:11, 12
Mother hen	Luke 13:34

Many rich female metaphors for God are found in Scripture. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase implies a comparison between something essentially unlike another in order to suggest a resemblance. Therefore, although female metaphors for God can be found, the literary devices do not imply that the masculine pronouns God chose to use for Himself can be altered or cast aside. However, they do indicate that the character of God encompasses and supersedes both masculinity and femininity. God is neither female nor male, although He may choose to liken His role to that of a mother when He conceives, bears, nurses, nurtures, and cares for His children. The umbilical metaphor is a useful tool to reveal God's nature and to communicate His love and concern through simple examples easily understood by all people.

Mark 10:35-45 "Whoever Desires to Become Great"

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

³⁷ They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

³⁹ They said to Him, "We are able."

So Jesus said to them, "⁴⁰You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; ⁴⁰but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* ⁹for whom it is prepared."

⁴¹ And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. ⁴² But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, ⁱ "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even ^kthe Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and ^lto give His life a ransom for many."

"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11).

Nietsche

"Life is one short bus ride, the problem is we spend the whole ride arguing over who gets the best seat."

God has gifted men with great capacities for responsible leadership. This can be channeled positively into the church and all walks of life through teaching, leading by moral example, and supporting righteous causes (1 Tim. 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.)

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Genesis 1:26-31

Man in our image: Adam (awdawm) ruddy, human being, species, mankind

Adam, *adam*. "Man" or "mankind." It is translated about **twenty** times in the Old Testament as a proper name "

Adam" and as a generic term for "man/mankind" over **five hundred** times.

Vs 27 Male = zakar (zaw-kawr') a male, of noteworthy sex

Female = neqebah (nek-ay-baw) femal, of sexual form,

Verse 27 is when sexuality entered the description of man

Our bodies are made up of about 15 or 16 chemical elements.

These same elements are found in the ground.

The physical part of man is made of dust.

"From dust you were created and to dust you shall return." Gen 3:19

What sets us apart?

READ NIV Gen 2:7 God breathed.. He gave us Him inside of us.

NotEs:

Lie #4

A woman should view her husband as the "priest of the home."

WHEN CHRISTIANS TWIST the Scriptures to make them say what they don't mean, the result is obvious: **we invent false doctrines**. That's what happened when Bible teachers began promoting the idea that husbands should function as "priests of the home." You can research this in a Bible concordance. **The phrase can't be found anywhere in the Scriptures.** *Neither the Old Testament nor the New tells us that men function as priests by representing their wives to God.* But this concept has become a primary focus of modern evangelical Christianity.

As a Bible-believing Christian, Mike* had been taught this idea all his adult life. Since the mid-1980s when he and his wife, Jill,* were married, he continually strived to function as the spiritual leader of his home—and his responsibility increased as each of their four children was born. He believed that in order to be a faithful man of God he must always "be in charge."

Mike also came to believe that if his wife ever stepped into a leadership role of any kind or if her opinions held sway in the home, Satan would be given a license to attack his family. So he insisted on controlling every aspect of home life. Jill was not allowed to pay the monthly bills or handle any aspect of their finances. If the children needed to be disciplined, Mike insisted on spanking them when he came home from work each evening. He made all major purchases—and he got angry with Jill when he discovered that she had bought a lawn chair without asking permission. He insisted on driving when he was in the car with his wife—and even considered it inappropriate for Jill to provide directions.

Mike felt it was his duty to remind Jill constantly that he was the driver in their relationship and that she needed to enjoy the ride. Jill always reluctantly agreed—because she felt God wouldn't be pleased if she didn't respect Mike's headship. She eventually became numb to her husband's controlling demands. Mike was never physically abusive, and his critical comments

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weren't frequent, but Jill began to feel like a spiritual zombie. Deep down she felt that Mike didn't trust her. And she felt her own desires and dreams were quietly dying.

It all erupted one winter day when their five-year-old son, Tyler,* got the flu. For five days he ran a high fever and had no energy and no desire to eat. In spite of all Jill did to try to strengthen Tyler's immune system by giving him vitamins, the symptoms persisted.

Because Mike and Jill were extremely health-conscious, they always tried natural homeopathic remedies before going to the doctor or taking over-the-counter medicines. But in this instance Tyler didn't seem to be responding to the natural products. So Jill decided to take him to the doctor, and the physician's assistant told her that Tyler had a respiratory infection that might become pneumonia if he didn't take antibiotics.

Jill had the prescription filled and intended to give a dose to Tyler as soon as she got back to the house. But when they arrived and Mike learned about the doctor's report, he told Jill not to give Tyler the medicine. No matter how much Jill pleaded, he refused—saying that the antibiotics might have negative side effects. Jill was so upset and so concerned for her son's safety that she erupted in anger and threatened to give the medicine to Tyler anyway. Mike then shot back: "I am the head of this house! You have to do what I say!"

Jill locked herself in her room and prayed as she wept beside the bed. She felt she'd been pushed into a corner by her husband's ironclad demands. Finally she placed the matter in God's hands. It seemed like the only way to preserve her sanity.

The next morning Tyler was so sick he couldn't get up to the table to eat. Jill felt desperate again, so she dared to express her concerns. "Is it right to withhold something from him that you know will alleviate his symptoms and help him get well?" she asked Mike. "Or would you rather watch him suffer while a bottle of medicine is within our reach?"

Mike looked at his wife with resignation and in a restrained tone said, "Give him the medicine." Within twenty-four hours Tyler had improved, and in only a few days he was well. Mike and Jill, meanwhile, were nursing the wounds that had resulted from this quarrel. Mike's pride was hurt because he felt his leadership had been challenged. Jill felt exhausted from having to push so hard to help her son. Their marriage was frayed in the process—and they eventually had to seek counseling.

These kinds of disagreements occur in Christian homes every day. In many cases, husbands and wives who argue over an issue will sit down, listen to each other, calmly try to understand the other spouse's perspective and then decide on a resolution. That's the way conflict management is supposed to work. **But domestic strife can't be resolved if the husband believes (1) that he is always right, (2) that it is wrong for him to defer to his wife, or (3) that his masculinity is weakened if he admits a mistake. If he believes all three of these fallacies, he qualifies as a first-degree tyrant.**

Patriarchs Don't Live Here Anymore

Millions of Christian men today believe their spirituality is measured by the level of firm control they can exert over their wives through "male headship," and they base their beliefs on a wrong interpretation of Scripture. These guys think they are being "real men of God" because they never listen to their wives' counsel or allow their godly masculinity to be "challenged" by their wives' opinions. Where did we get the idea that this authoritarian style of leadership is even remotely Christlike?

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The rigid, patriarchal view of the Christian family says that men have been placed in the God-ordained role of full-time boss and provider. The husband's role, according to the conservative religious model, is to lead and protect his wife, while her role is to trust him and submit to his authority at all times without question. Since he is supposedly smarter, stronger, and more spiritually capable, the woman has no option but to accept her inferior status.

This view has been derived by misreading the words of Paul in **Ephesians 5:23–28**:

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies.

As mentioned earlier in this book, we cannot understand the full meaning of a Bible passage without reading it in light of its **cultural context**.

- We must remember that at the time Paul penned these words (probably a.d. 60), women had no rights in society and were viewed as the property of either their fathers or their husbands.
- Men considered women to be ignorant (and most of them were, since men didn't allow females to be educated).
- First-century Ephesus was steeped in Greek and Roman culture. Greeks viewed women with disdain; Romans taught that wives should stay in their place as inferiors. The Roman philosopher Plutarch believed that women "ought to do their talking either to their husbands or through their husbands." The famous statesman Cato once warned Roman leaders in a speech: "As soon as [women] begin to be your equals, they will become your superiors."⁵
- In New Testament times, a man's idea of "ruling the family" was to keep his wife shut away in the house to do back-breaking chores, tend the family farm, provide sexual gratification, and bear as many children as he wanted so he could have plenty of laborers to harvest the crops. If she died in childbirth, he found another wife. If she didn't please him in bed, he paid a younger woman outside the home to meet his sexual needs. If his wife shamed him, he beat her. If she dared to run away, he found her and beat her again.
- Historian Ruth Tucker notes that in Greek society during the New Testament period, most men considered their homebound wives boring—so they typically sought the companionship of *hetaerae*, or professional female escorts. "Athenian law of all periods tended to regard the wife as a veritable child, having the legal status of a minor compared to her husband," Tucker writes. There were no laws against wife abuse. And if a man divorced his wife for any reason, she was economically stranded; the law gave her no recourse to claim any of his estate.
- Yet when Paul introduced the Christian message to the Ephesians, **he came with a radically new model of family** that went to the very core of what was wrong with the

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world: “*Husbands, love your wives*” (Eph. 5:25). Perhaps we don’t realize what a revolutionary concept these four words were in the first century!

- It was even more radical when Paul told the men of Ephesus to **love their wives “as their own bodies”** (v. 28). **This meant that men and women were equals.** It meant that Christian men would have to break out of their pagan Middle Eastern mind-set and stop looking down on the wives as if they were brainless, inferior animals. **Paul’s simple words shattered gender prejudice at its core.**
- And when Paul told the men to love their wives “as Christ also loved the church” (v. 25), he implied something even more revolutionary: **women are just as deserving of the grace of God as men are.** We find in these tender verses the bedrock foundation for the Christian idea of gender equality.

Two Kinds of Christian Husbands

- Paul was blatantly contradicting the worldly philosophy of the ancient world, which taught that men and women live on two different social strata.
- In the kingdom of God, Paul declared, marriage is different from marriage in the world. Men don’t beat their wives; men don’t rule their homes like despots; men don’t threaten divorce as a means to manipulate or control. In God’s kingdom, husbands treat their wives with respect—yes, even as equals.
- Paul was declaring in this passage that men are no longer “over” women. Husbands can no longer dominate their wives or treat them like chattel. Now that Jesus Christ has come, the curse of male domination over females that began in the Garden of Eden has been broken. Women have been restored to a place of respect and dignity! This was good news for the women of Ephesus; it is good news for all women today.

But if this is true, then why does Paul still say the husband should function as the “head” of his wife? (See Ephesians 5:23.) Does this not give him the right to dominate her? **That depends on whether we want a Christian model of leadership or a worldly one.**

After all, didn’t Jesus say that leadership was defined by servant-hood?

Ephesians 5 is not about hierarchy; it is about equality. But if we read Paul’s words through a warped lens, it’s easy to impose our own misconceptions about male-female relationships on the text. That’s why we need the Holy Spirit to help us when we read the Scriptures.

Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, in her book *Good News for Women*, explains that there are really **two kinds of male headship** from which to choose.

- One is what she calls “life-giving headship,” which was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden when He took Eve out of Adam’s side.
- The opposing model is what she refers to as “ruling headship,” which began with the Fall when man and woman came under the curse of sin. Christian men today often view ruling headship as the godly way to lead a family—but it is the wrong model.

Writes Groothuis: “The biblical headship of the husband described in Ephesians 5 is redemptive, **in that it mitigates the effect of the fall which places the woman under male rule, and it helps to reinstate woman in her creational place of cultural responsibility alongside man.** In life-giving headship, the social privilege and power of maleness is shared by the

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husband with the wife, and utilized by him according to the terms of love rather than of male conquest and demand. By recognizing her personal and spiritual equality with him, and by putting all that he has and is at her disposal, a husband undoes the male rulership of the Fall and, by God's grace, saves his wife from its effects."

In other words, true biblical headship in marriage can be seen only when the husband (1) recognizes that his wife is his equal, (2) loves her sacrificially, and (3) empowers his wife by allowing her to share his authority.

[IF we insist on the curse of sin outlined in Genesis be followed for women, it must also still be in tach for men. What would that look like???

Is this not what Jesus did for the church? He condescended by leaving the glories of heaven and taking on the form of a human being. He gave Himself willingly to die on the cross and then bestowed His heavenly authority on His followers, making us coheirs of His kingdom. This is the pattern Christian husbands **must** follow.

Humble my heart

Acknowledge the equality of creation by:

- Laying their life down
- Accepting Christ's pattern of submission
- Accepting Christ's pattern of elevation
- Priest of the home – lie (Very Islamic) – Taking Christ's role in your wife's life.

They must humble themselves first by acknowledging that they are on equal footing with their wives. Then they must fully bestow upon their wives the same authority they have—so that together they can rule. This is Christlike headship.

It is a radical concept, and some Christians who have been steeped in the religious tradition of male domination will oppose it violently. Some Christian husbands have made a lifestyle out of being **benevolent dictators** in the home—and they will most likely quote portions of Ephesians 5 to defend their behavior. Tragically, many women have embraced the idea of being Christian doormats, and they have made their subservience such a part of their identity as women that it has become a place of security for them that they cannot abandon—even though the Spirit of God is calling them to a higher place of liberty.

A Better Understanding of Headship

When church leaders raise the issue of male headship, they are referring to two passages in the New Testament: Ephesians 5:23 ("For the husband is the head of the wife") and 1 Corinthians 11:3 ("the man is the head of a woman"). Some people have assumed that this means men have been designed by God to be the leaders in society, while women are called to be followers. And they assume this is God's model for the church as well.

But we need to be careful here, noting that in both of these passages Paul is discussing a wife's relationship with her husband, not a woman's relationship with all other men.

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i.e. Sex cult Nun

In actuality, it would be a heretical concept to teach that all women are somehow to be placed in subjection to all men. Paul is not talking here about men and women in general. He is discussing marriage in particular.

HEADSHIP:

If we investigate these two passages deeper, we discover that the concept of headship is not really about authority at all. It is about intimacy, mutuality, and the unique connection that exists between a husband and wife. The word used here for “**head**” in the Greek is *kephale*, which can be translated “**source**,” as the headwaters of a river are the source of the river. If Paul had meant to say, “The husband is the boss of the wife,” or “The husband is the leader of the wife,” he would have used the Greek word *archon*, which is often used in the New Testament to denote authority. Instead, he uses *kephale*, a rarer term.

Why would Paul say that the husband is the *source* of the wife? **In both passages, he is referring to the origin of woman in the Garden of Eden. Adam was the “head,” or “source,” of Eve because she was taken from his side. And because she came from him, she as the wife enjoys a unique connection to him that cannot be paralleled by any other human relationship.**

The headship principle, therefore, really has nothing to do with authority in the home. It stresses, rather, the **mutual dependence** that a man and wife have on each other, and it calls on husbands to nourish and cherish their wives since they have such an intimate connection with them in a spiritual sense. Theologian Gilbert Bilezikian says it best in his book *Beyond Sex Roles*:

Because man as the fountainhead of woman’s existence was originally used to supply her with her very life, and because he continues to love her sacrificially as his own body in marriage, in return a Christian wife binds herself to her husband in a similar relationship of servant submission that expresses their oneness. The imposition of an authority structure upon this exquisite balance of reciprocity would **paganize** the marriage relationship.

Indeed, if male headship in marriage is not about top-down authority, then why would we impose such a hierarchical concept on male/ female relationships in the church?

We Have One Priest

It is true that husbands function in a priestly role in the home when they pray for their wives and family or when they minister the Word of God to them. But we cannot use the “male headship” reference in Ephesians 5:23 to suggest that wives don’t also function in this same priestly role at home. Don’t wives function as priests when they pray for their husbands? Don’t wives teach the Word of God to their children? Can’t they also teach their husbands, assuming that their husbands are wise enough (and humble enough) to listen to the rich spiritual insights their wives receive from the Holy Spirit?

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Many traditionalists act as if only the husband has full access to God's presence. How ridiculous—and how arrogant! **In the throne room of God, His children are not segregated by gender, with men in the holy of holies and women in the outer courtyard. God's grace is made fully available to women and men alike.**

The Bible doesn't say only men can understand spiritual truths or receive the Holy Spirit's guidance. When a woman marries, her ability to hear from God is not disconnected. Her authority as a believer in Christ is not surrendered when she recites her wedding vows. Yet this is what we imply when we tell men that they must serve as the sole priests of the home.

Two passages in the New Testament specifically mention the priestly role that a wife can play in her marriage.

- In **1 Peter 3:1–2**, we are told that a Christian woman has the authority in Christ to pull her husband out of disobedience and unbelief. Peter told his readers:

You wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

- Also, Paul told the Corinthians that the woman's authority in Christ can have powerful impact on an unbelieving husband. He writes in **1 Corinthians 7:13–14**:

And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

We should never underestimate the power of a praying wife or the power of her Spirit-directed words. A woman who seeks God and intercedes for her family will speak with an anointing that can pierce hard hearts with conviction. Through her prayers, souls can be converted, alcoholic husbands can be delivered from their addiction, and wayward children can be drawn to repentance. Women can rule with God! Why would we want to deny them this God-given place of spiritual authority?

I would certainly not want my wife to stop praying so that I could fulfill all the priestly duties in my family. The two of us are in spiritual partnership. We are co-laborers in the kingdom, and we are both priests unto God. I expect the Lord to speak to my wife. In many instances, the Holy Spirit has shown her things about our future before He has spoken to me. God has never said to me, "I will reveal My will to you for your family, and then you can tell them what I said." He doesn't speak to me first and my wife later, nor does He limit His dealings with her by speaking "through" me alone.

Back in the 1970s, a large number of Charismatic Christians in the United States got involved in what came to be known as the discipleship movement, also known as the shepherding movement. The five ministers who led it from their base in Fort Lauderdale, Florida—Ern Baxter, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, Bob Mumford, and Don Basham—taught that every Christian needs a personal "shepherd," an older, more mature Christian who can provide counsel about important life decisions. Everyone involved in the shepherding movement had good intentions when they started, but it quickly spun out of control in the 1980s as reports of spiritual abuse became common.

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In some churches, pastors told their congregations that they needed to obtain an elder's stamp of approval before taking a new job or relocating to another city. People began to seek permission from their shepherds before making major purchases. A pastor in Virginia told one man in his church that he needed to seek pastoral permission before having another child; another pastor in Michigan chastised a woman because she received a reimbursement check from the Internal Revenue Service and did not seek her shepherd's counsel before spending it. (In many cases these shepherds required their "sheep" to tithe directly to them.)

Many of the people who survived the shepherding controversy without losing their marriages—or their faith altogether—still deal with serious emotional wounds today. Many felt betrayed by spiritual authority; others felt their own relationship with God was stolen from them. By submitting to this form of spiritual abuse, they relinquished the position of access to Jesus Christ that is offered to every believer as a privilege.

Because of the hierarchical structure of the shepherding movement, the sheep were required to go to a man to hear from God. They no longer could approach God for themselves. This often resulted in a sense of worthlessness and shame, and it led to bizarre doctrinal deception because believers started following the teachings of men without listening to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that is every believer's safeguard.

The shepherding controversy was an embarrassing form of Charismatic excess that became cultic. Yet Bible-believing Christians participate in the same type of cultic behavior when they teach that their husbands must function as their wives' priests. They are, in essence, denying women access to God.

Many Christian traditionalists maintain that women should live in the background and allow their husbands to represent them both to the church and to God. They also teach that the husband is responsible for the wife's behavior, as if she were some kind of puppet on a string whom he must manipulate. This is emotionally crippling to women— and it is heretical.

To believe that husbands function as representatives of their wives before God is to believe that women need a mediator other than Christ—and that is the very heresy that sparked the Protestant Reformation! The martyrs who were tortured at the hands of medieval bishops and popes died to defend the doctrine that believers in Christ do not need human mediaries. Why, then, are we promoting today the idea that men must serve as priests for their wives?

The Bible tells us that under the Old Covenant, before the redemptive work of Christ and the advent of the Holy Spirit, God dealt with men through priests. Israel's priesthood represented the people to God and symbolically atoned for their sins by sacrificing animals and offering incense before the holy altar. Of course, their work was simply a foreshadowing of the work of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. (See Hebrews 8:1.)

Before the coming of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God also revealed His purposes through special human messengers who were endowed with a limited measure of the Spirit that enabled them to prophesy and to understand God's will. Under the Old Covenant, God limited His work to these anointed individuals. Yet under the New Covenant, *all* believers have been given the Holy Spirit's power, along with full access to "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17, NKJV). We do not have to seek out a prophet like Moses or Samuel to know God's will; we don't have to travel to a special

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place to find God's presence; we don't have to sacrifice animals to find forgiveness or appear before human priests to obtain cleansing.

Now that Jesus has secured our eternal access into the presence of God, the veil that separated Him from the people has been torn from top to bottom. (See Matthew 27:51.) We have been invited to come boldly before His throne. And, most importantly, we now have been qualified to be priests unto God. **First Peter 2:5, 9** says:

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

—NKJV, EMPHASIS ADDED

Peter does not tell us here that only male believers in Christ are part of this New Covenant priesthood. There is no reference to gender in this passage because "there is neither male nor female . . . in Christ" (**Gal. 3:28**, NKJV). Women have been clothed with the priestly garments of holiness, and they have been commissioned to express the authority of His name. No husband has the biblical right to stand in his wife's way, and no wife should dare excuse herself from her higher calling.

Wives Don't Have to Be Wimps

There are, of course, many Christian women who have come to accept the milder, more subtle forms of male domination, and perhaps some of them even enjoy it. They don't want more ministry opportunities, nor do they think other women should push for gender equality. I have heard their arguments often: "I don't want the man's role. My husband provides a spiritual covering for me, and I appreciate it. He's a good provider. I'm glad I have a man to submit to. God speaks to my husband, and I believe I should trust his leadership. God has called women to be meek. I know my place."

It sounds so spiritual! But although it is admirable for a woman to love and trust her husband, **submissiveness can actually become a form of idolatry. This happens any time we place a human relationship above our relationship with God.** The family is a wonderful creation of God, and we should do everything possible to protect it and enhance it, but we must never love family more than God Himself.

Can a Christian husband become an idol? Yes. Can the ideal of a "happy Christian family" become an idol? Absolutely. How many women have said no to God's will because what He was calling them to do did not match their idea of how a submissive wife should act? How many women have rejected God's plan in order to please their husbands—or their children?

It is tragic that women would sell their birthrights by settling for such a meager portion. God did not call His daughters to be spineless and passive! He did not destine them to be silent when the world is in need of His witness. When the Holy Ghost energizes a woman, she will feel the fire of God as if it were shut up in her bones (Jer. 20:9), and at that point she will feel as though she must preach, pray, or prophesy. And we the church must not stand in her way. In this hour, we need a generation of holy women who are so consumed with God's purposes that they will not let anything or anyone stop them.

I'm not calling women to be rebellious or to act superior to men. I'm not inviting Christian women to embrace the anger of the secular feminist movement, which teaches women to hate

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men and to kill unborn babies. But godly women, like godly men, must be as bold as lions. (See Proverbs 28:1.) Christian women need to start roaring!

Traditionalists will condemn this aggressive form of feminine spiritual zeal as inappropriate. They will contend that women must have a “meek and quiet spirit” (quoting 1 Peter 3:4 as their defense) and insist that God’s best plan is for men to be on the front lines of spiritual warfare. Don’t believe it! Women have a strategic role to play in the army of the Lord; the men cannot do it by themselves.

Does meekness mean women can’t preach passionate sermons or storm heaven with prayer? Does meekness mean women can’t lead a national campaign to stop injustice in society? Does meekness mean women can’t go to Muslim or Buddhist nations and plant churches— even when it is illegal to do so? Does meekness prevent women from charging into blighted urban areas to set up drug rehabilitation programs, feeding stations, and Christian schools to bring social transformation? Jesus was meek, but He took a whip and drove the moneychangers out of the temple.

Jesus was humble, but He looked straight into the eyes of the Pharisees and called them whitewashed tombs. Meekness has nothing to do with wimpishness, and women of God have not been called to be soft and compliant with the devil or cowardly in the face of spiritual challenges.

The history of the church has been enriched by the lives of courageous women who dared to step “out of their place” in society to serve God. The historian Eusebius recorded many of their stories. He tells of Quinta, a woman who was stoned to death under the reign of the Roman emperor Decius because she would not worship idols; of Potamiaena, who was abused by gladiators and then killed when her torturers poured boiling tar on her body; and of the elderly Appollonia, who was burned at the stake after her persecutors pulled out all her teeth with pliers.

Eusebius wrote of these martyrs: “The women showed themselves no less manly than the men, inspired by the teaching of the divine word: Some, undergoing the same contests as the men, won equal rewards for their valor; and others, when they were being dragged away to dishonor, yielded up their souls to death rather than their bodies to seduction.”

Foxe’s Book of Martyrs tells us of Symphrosa, who was killed under the reign of Emperor Trajan (a.d. 98–117) because she refused to bow her knee to a pagan god. A Roman woman named Felicitas was beheaded during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (a.d. 161–180), and her sons were also tortured and killed because she refused to recant her faith in Christ. Other women were torn in half by metal hooks, laid on hot coals, burned at the stake, drowned in rivers, and even crucified.

Their deaths produced the seeds that gave birth to the bravery of Christian women who would follow. Women like Joan Waste, who was burned at the stake by British Catholics in 1556 because she obtained a copy of the New Testament and memorized large portions of it. Or Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century nun who had to hide from her Catholic persecutors because she sought to reform the church by teaching on the love of God. Or Madame Jeanne Guyon, a French Catholic who dared to travel and preach in spite of harsh opposition from her superiors, who told her, “It is the business of priests to pray, not women.” Guyon’s books were burned, and she spent the last seven years of her life in solitary confinement in the Bastille.

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Where would we be today if the brave women of centuries past did not step “out of their place” of passivity to pave the way for the expansion of the kingdom of Christ? What would the world be like if Quaker leader Margaret Fell (1614–1702) had not continued to hold her evangelistic meetings in Boston, even though she was arrested on several occasions and imprisoned for four years? What if eighteenth-century Methodist evangelist Sarah Crosby had not spent twenty years of her life riding on horseback to lead gospel meetings in England? What if nineteenth-century missionary Amanda Smith, a daughter of African slaves, had shrunk from her call to India because her Christian critics told her that women shouldn’t preach or go to foreign mission fields?

These women didn’t let a man stop them from obeying the Holy Spirit’s call. They didn’t need a man to sanction their ministries or represent them before God. And they didn’t wait until a male-dominated church asked them to serve the Lord.

I appeal to you, women of God: let nothing hold you back from fulfilling His call. Don’t wait for your husband’s permission to pursue God more passionately. Press further into Him, and bring your husband and children with you. Expect to be used by the Holy Spirit to change your world. Dare to ask Him for your holy assignment, and tell Him that you are willing to die to your fears in order to fulfill His mission.

* Names have been changed to protect privacy.

* Not his real name.

Chapter 4

Questions for Discussion

1. Explain the difference between “life-giving headship” and “ruling headship” in a husband. Why is ruling headship not a Christlike way to exercise authority?
2. Discuss the story of Mike and Jill that appears at the beginning of this chapter. How do you think a woman should respond if her husband has an authoritarian view of male headship?
3. Read Ephesians 5:22–29. Why was this instruction to the first-century church in Ephesus such a revolutionary way to describe the relationship between husbands and wives?
4. Discuss ways that husbands and wives both serve God and each other as “priests.” Why is it unhealthy for men to view themselves as the only priests in the home?
5. Peter instructed women to have a meek and gentle spirit. How can women act in this manner and still display courage and spiritual zeal? Do you feel you need to become more bold in your faith? If so, what might be causing you to be passive or fearful?

I am not unacquainted with the word of Paul that women should be silent in the church . . . but when no man will or can speak, I am driven by the Word of the Lord when He said, “He who confesses Me on earth, him will I confess and him who denies Me, him I will deny.”

—ARGULA VON GRUMBACK (1492–1563)

BAVARIAN REFORMER WHO WAS IMPRISONED FOR TEACHING THE BIBLE

The rule is express and plain that women ought not to speak in the church, but to be in silence. . . . And therefore they ought not to vote in church matters, besides voting imports some kind of government, and authority and power: Now it is not government and authority, but subjection and obedience which belongs unto women . . . and so is the practice of women among us.

—NEW ENGLAND CONGREGATIONAL LEADER RICHARD MATHER
(1596–1669)

Meetings of pious women by themselves, for conversation and prayer, we entirely approve. But let not the inspired prohibition of the great Apostle, as found in his

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Epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy, be violated. To teach and to exhort, or to lead in prayer in public and promiscuous assemblies is clearly forbidden to women in the holy oracles.

—LAWS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
ENACTED BY THE 1837 GENERAL ASSEMBLY⁶

Lie #10

Women must obediently submit to their husbands in all situations.

YEARS AGO, *CHARISMA* magazine reporter Marcia Ford set out to uncover the reason so much spouse abuse occurs in evangelical and Charismatic churches. She was aware of the statistics: an estimated four million women are assaulted each year by their current or former spouses. She also had reason to believe that many Christian women were victims in this national trend. But she was surprised to learn, after talking with the director of a prominent counseling clinic, that many of the calls that came into the Rapha Treatment Center's hot line in Dallas not only were from Christians—they were from pastors' wives who said their minister husbands were beating them.

Though the church has been successful at justifying this abuse, or hiding it, one study Ford discovered while doing her research said that pastors typically did not know how to help women who were being abused by their Christian husbands. In a survey of battered women who successfully escaped their abusers, the women who sought help from pastors were usually told to (1) continue to submit to their husbands and (2) pray for the men that they would stop the abusive behavior. It's no wonder the women ranked clergy last in their ability to provide any helpful guidance.

The church has, unknowingly, created an environment that encourages abuse. We cite familiar Bible passages demanding that wives submit to their husbands without providing any explanation of what submission means in a practical sense and without outlining what these same biblical passages demand of husbands. Our counseling has been illogical and irresponsible.

Take, for example, the story of Doris,* a middle-aged woman who attended an Assemblies of God church in the Northeast with her husband, Edward.* Although he was the church's head deacon and was respected by the pastor and the congregation, Edward was privately abusing his wife. For no apparent reason he would erupt into a fit of rage after coming home from work, slapping or hitting Doris in the face so often that she learned to master the art of covering her bruises with makeup.

Doris lived in a prison of inner turmoil. She didn't dare tell anyone at the church about her husband's irrational behavior. She kept trying to appease him. She assumed that one day she would discover what was making him angry and that she would then be able to adjust her own behavior so he wouldn't explode.

Finally, after several serious episodes of violence, she told her pastor. He didn't really believe the abuse was that serious, and he told her she needed to submit.

⁶ Grady, J. L. (2013). [*Ten lies the church tells women: how the bible has been misused to keep women in spiritual bondage*](#). Charisma House.

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“He’s your husband. You can’t just leave him,” the pastor said. “It’s his house. You’re his wife. He has authority over you. You must be making him angry.”

Doris was devastated. The pastor had confirmed her worst nightmare. He told her that she was the reason her husband was abusive. It was her fault! On two other occasions Doris returned for pastoral counseling, hoping that perhaps the pastor would change his opinion. On one occasion she expressed sincere fears for her life.

“Don’t worry,” the pastor said. “Even if you died you would go to be with the Lord. So you win either way. Just keep praying for him. But you are not allowed to leave.”

A friend of mine named Nancie finally counseled with Doris and realized how serious the situation had become. She told her to get out of the house immediately, but by then Doris had almost no resolve left. She had been brainwashed into thinking that she was worthless and that her life would be over if she left this man who didn’t love her.

Nancie begged Doris to move to a shelter or to a friend’s house. But Doris politely declined—and repeated what her pastor had told her. “I know I don’t have the right to leave him,” she said.

Nancie moved to Florida a few months later, but she tried to keep in touch with Doris. Not long after their last telephone conversation, Nancie heard the dreaded news: Edward had killed Doris. As bizarre as it sounds, this Christian woman was murdered by her own husband, a deacon in a Pentecostal church. Those who counsel abused women say this story is not as unique as it sounds.

As is often the case, this church’s pastor doubted the battered woman’s story, so he dragged his feet instead of properly dealing with a life-and-death situation. He shrugged off this report of a Christian man who acted in a domineering manner—since authoritarian behavior in the home is actually encouraged by many pastors.

After all, if a man erupts in anger at home or is overly demanding, isn’t he just demonstrating that he is in charge? Isn’t it a godly virtue for Christian men to act strong and authoritarian? Isn’t it true that if a man doesn’t remain in absolute control, he is in danger of becoming spiritually weak, and this is opening up a door for spiritual attack on his home? Many evangelical Christian men today might agree with this philosophy—but the logic is ridiculous. We should also note that Paul told Timothy that a man given to anger is not qualified to serve in ministry. (See 1 Timothy 3:3.)

One of the most comprehensive studies on domestic violence in the church was conducted in the **mid-1980s by clinical psychologist Jim M. Alsdurf, a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary. Based on a questionnaire sent to fifty-seven hundred Protestant pastors in the United States and Canada**, the survey revealed that though most pastors regularly confront spouse abuse in their ministries, they often are not overly concerned because they view the situation from a patriarchal perspective. In essence, this attitude says, “According to the Bible, Christian men are supposed to be in charge of the home, so a little yelling and hitting is OK.” Consider Alsdurf’s findings:

- **Twenty-six percent** of the pastors polled said they normally tell a woman who is being abused by her husband that she should continue to submit to him “and to trust that God would honor her action by either stopping the abuse or giving her the strength to endure it.”

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- **About 25 percent** of the respondents said a lack of submissiveness in the wife is what triggered the violence in the first place. In other words, these pastors believe that the abuse is actually the woman's fault. The women are told that if they would "learn to submit," the violence will stop.
- **A majority** of the pastors said it is better for a woman to tolerate some level of violence in the home—even though it is "not God's perfect will"—than to seek separation that might end in divorce. (Is it "better" even if the woman is killed, maimed, or raped?)
- **Seventy-one percent** of the ministers said they would never advise a battered wife to leave her husband or separate because of abuse, and **92 percent** said they would never counsel her to seek divorce.

Christian homes and churches are in a sad state indeed if there have not been significant changes in clergy attitudes since this survey was taken. The Bible is clear on the point that God opposes violence (**Prov. 21:7; Ezek. 45:9**). **In fact, Jesus warned against those who take advantage of people who are physically weaker. Yet we are actually promoting a theology that encourages violence when we tell a woman she must learn to "endure" beatings. (See Matthew 18:1–6.)**

A pastor should be willing to counsel a woman to seek separation or divorce when her marriage is jeopardized by domestic violence. Why don't we do this? Because our unbalanced interpretation of Scripture can hinder us from seeing divorce as a viable option for Christians. In a fallen world, however, we must recognize that sometimes it is the only option.

Divorce is a tragic problem in our society, and we can't minimize its negative effects, particularly on children. But some of the Christian community's opposition to divorce has been more of a concern for the church's image than for the individuals involved. We aren't proud of the fact that so many Christian marriages fail, so we don't want to do anything to make the statistics worse.

James and Phyllis Alsdurf point out in their book *Abuse and Religion* that we evangelicals are fond of quoting **Malachi 2:16**, "For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce" (NKJV). **Yet if we go to the next sentence we read, "And I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment" (NIV). A footnote in the New International Version says the verse can be translated, "I hate a man's covering his wife with violence."**

Yes, God hates divorce. But we can see in this passage in Malachi that He also hates wife-beating and any other form of abuse. Women do not have to stay in dangerous marital situations just to keep divorce statistics low. God cares deeply about the safety and well-being of women. He is not concerned that one more divorce will mar the church's image. We too need to start caring more about vulnerable women (and their children) than about how another divorce might look on our record.

Irresponsible Theology

A distraught Christian woman who had been regularly beaten by her husband for four years finally gained the courage to seek counsel from her pastor, who was affiliated with a prominent evangelical denomination. She told him about her husband's addiction to pornography, his fits of rage, and how he had once thrown her against a wall so hard that she heard a cracking sound in the back of her neck.

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The pastor's response was frightening: "If your husband kills you," he advised, "it will be to the glory of God." Her only option, he told her, was to submit and pray that God would change her husband's heart.

This is perverted! How did we ever invent a "Christian" theology that encourages a woman to risk injury or death at the hands of her husband to please God? How warped a woman's view of God would have to be for her to accept such counsel!

The root problem with our theology is that the church has taught that men have a biblical right to dominate—and we have instructed women that their submission to this ungodly behavior is God-ordained suffering, which they must willingly bear. This butchering of biblical texts distorts the character of Christ—who spent much of His time teaching on God's care for the oppressed.

Let's look carefully at a verse that is most often used to promote this wrong view, and set the record straight.

Because the apostle Paul told women to "submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (**Eph. 5:22**, NIV), we have assumed that women should have no say in family matters or that their opinion is second-rate. This verse, taken out of context, has been twisted to mean that the husband is the boss and that the woman must obey his every whim. We portray marriage as a hierarchy, with husbands on the throne and wives at the footstool.

But this is not a Christian view of marriage at all. The first rule of biblical hermeneutics is that we look at *all of Scripture* to clarify the meaning of a particular text. So before we can understand this one verse, we must look at what the Bible in general teaches about submission and authority.

In more than one instance Jesus taught that a true leader in the kingdom of God is a *servant*. He said the greatest must be the *least*. He told His disciples that they must become as *children*. He said in Mark 10:44 that "whoever wishes to be first among you shall be *slave of all*" (emphasis added.)

How do we apply this passage to marriage? Certainly it should be clear that if a man is called to lead a family, his leadership must be Christlike. He must serve, not dictate. He must display humility, not a know-it-all attitude. He must lead from a position of meekness, not from prideful superiority, or tyrannical domination.

In fact, Jesus flatly condemned the worldly style of top-down, hierarchical leadership when He taught that His kingdom is not like that of the Gentiles, whose leaders "lord it over" their subordinates. (See Matthew 20:25–26.) Why would Christ condemn this kind of behavior on one hand and then encourage husbands to act in an authoritarian manner at home? He didn't, and neither did the apostle Paul.

When we read Paul's discourse on marriage in Ephesians 5, we must start with verse 21, "Submit to *one another* out of reverence for Christ" (NIV, emphasis added). This verse has been conveniently overlooked in many Christian marriage seminars, which usually start the lesson with verse 22, "Wives, submit to your husbands" (NIV). I have often heard teachings on the subject of male headship in the home, but I've never heard a pastor encourage men to submit to their wives as suggested in verse 21. Yet in a loving marriage, a man and woman will defer to one another when they make decisions.

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A closer look at this passage reveals that this teaching begins with verse 21, which encourages all believers to submit to one another “in the fear of the Christ.” To promote an attitude of submissiveness in the entire church, Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands, husbands to their wives, children to their parents and slaves to their masters. Submission, not in the sense of domination or rulership over another, but in the sense of preferring one another and not demanding personal rights, should be operating in the entire body of Christ in order to reveal the love of Christ to the world.

We also must note that **the Greek word for submission, *hupotasso*, is written in the Greek middle voice, which means it is something that an individual imposes upon himself or herself.** It means to choose to yield to another, rather than demanding one’s own way. Submission remains the freewill right of the one choosing to yield. *It cannot be demanded from another individual or imposed upon one person by another.* When this occurs, it stops being *hupotasso* and becomes *domination*, which was an attitude Christ forbade His disciples to operate in with regard to one another (Matt. 23:10). Submission is not something that can be required or exacted from another person.

The overarching theme of marriage in the Bible is the concept of *unity* and *oneness*. Couples should develop a deep level of intimacy and trust that blossoms as they work out differences, share dreams, and walk through hardships together. In my twenty-two years of marriage, my wife and I have had plenty of disagreements: over finances, over the education of our children, and over trivial matters. But when we disagree, I do not announce, “I am the head of this house, so what I say goes.” When we reach an impasse, Deborah and I either agree to pray for a season about the matter, or we choose to defer to one another. This is the concept of biblical submission that the apostle Paul attempted to convey in Ephesians. I don’t demand my way, and Deborah doesn’t demand hers. Instead, we both humbly seek after God’s way, His will, and His purpose. When our hearts are truly His, biblical submission is easy.

The point is never who is right or wrong or who is in charge. The issue is how we can discover the mind of Christ. I view my wife as an equal. I am not “over her.” We function as one.

Paul told husbands, “This is how you love your wives, by giving up your life, your way, and your rights, as Christ gave up His.” Remember that Christ was Lord of the universe and laid down His crown by submitting Himself unto death. The Bible says He took on the form of a servant. He laid down His life to raise us up. This is the purpose of biblical submission.

We must notice also in studying Ephesians 5 that Paul does not focus the text solely on the need for wifely submission. His words in this passage stress the loving attitude husbands should demonstrate at home. Men are commanded to love their wives “as Christ also loved the church” (v. 25) and “as their own bodies” (v. 28). These words were revolutionary in a first-century culture that taught that wives were their husband’s property!

Marriages are doomed to serious dysfunction and ultimate failure if the husband views his wife as inferior or if he arrogantly assumes that God wants him to always have the right answer and the wisest plan in every situation. No! The reason God provided Adam with Eve was because the man couldn’t do it alone. He needed an equal partner who complemented him in every way.

So, Is the Husband the Boss?

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The passage of Scripture that is so often misused with regard to the complex issue of male headship is Ephesians 5:22–23:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church.

—EMPHASIS ADDED

Contrary to popular interpretation, these verses do not give men a license to dominate their wives, nor do they endorse a kind of top-down hierarchy in the marriage relationship.

One of Paul’s main reasons for writing this discourse on family relationships was to stress the beauty of the mystical union between man and wife, which he compares to the communion between Christ and the church.

If Paul were trying to declare who was in charge, he would have said, “Wives, *obey* your husbands,” in the same manner that he states in Colossians 3:20, “Children, *obey* your parents” (NIV, emphasis added). But he does not use the word *obey*.

The word *hupotasso* can also mean “to identify with” or “to be attached to.” It can also mean “become one with.” Again, the issue here is oneness and unity between equal partners, not who obeys whom.

But there is another important reason Paul wrote these words, and we cannot understand their meaning without delving deeper into the culture of the New Testament period.

Theologian Catherine Clark Kroeger has noted that in the first century, women had no rights and were considered possessions. In the Roman Empire, it was customary for the woman’s father to continue to claim ownership of his daughter even after she was married.

This inhumane system, known as *sine manu*, or “marriage without hand,” was a way for the bride’s dowry to stay under the control of her father even after she moved into her husband’s home. As long as she was brought back to her father’s house three times a year (sometimes against her will), he could claim legal ownership of her and her property. This system, which was later outlawed, obviously created havoc in families.

Knowing the context helps us understand why Paul stressed to the new Christian community in Ephesus that a wife should “be attached to” or “submitted to” or “identified with” her husband. She was no longer to be attached to her father! And this is why Paul, a few verses later, quotes Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph. 5:31, NKJV).

But if this passage in Ephesians does not give men permission to dominate their wives, then why does Paul say that a husband is “head” (v. 23) of the wife?

The Greek word for “head” in this passage is *kephale*, which is most often translated “authority over.” However, some Bible scholars point out that this word can and often is translated “source” in ancient texts, in much the same way that we would refer to the “head” of a river being its source. Therefore it is possible that *kephale* can mean here that man is the *source* of woman, a reference to the fact that Eve was created from Adam.

Again, many scholars believe that Paul is setting in order the true Christian family in the midst of a pagan Roman culture that treated women like property and disregarded the autonomy of a newlywed couple. According to God’s plan, when a man and a woman come together in holy matrimony they must sever their ties to parents, grandparents, and any other controlling

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influences from relatives. **The man must leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. (See Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31.) She must “submit,” or “become attached to,” her husband, rather than continue to relate to her father as her “head.”**

If we truly want to understand the meaning of Ephesians 5, these cultural factors must be considered. Paul’s words to this infant New Testament church were meant to liberate women who had been subjected to a patriarchal system that did not even recognize their personhood. The gospel proclaimed in this passage set in motion a way to revolutionize that culture—and to transform the nature of men who did not know how to love their wives.

How tragic that we have used Paul’s liberating words to put women in bondage!

Gender Bias Around the World

Gender prejudice has been at the core of fallen human nature since the Garden of Eden, and we see its effects everywhere. It is the way of the world. It has been encoded in all of the world’s religions. A degrading view of women is pervasive in almost every culture, but nowhere is it more evident than in the Middle East.

The stories of abuse of women from the Muslim world are horrific. Take for example the case of a Palestinian girl named Saana, who at age eighteen was forced into an arranged marriage to a Muslim man she didn’t love. *The Middle East Intelligence Digest* reported her tragic story to illustrate that women are incredibly vulnerable in a culture that considers females to be the literal property of their husbands or other male relatives.

Because Saana was so unhappy, she ran away from her new home at one point and ended up with friends in another West Bank village. Her family tracked her down within six hours and forced her to return to her husband. The next day, Saana’s brother killed her, decapitated her body, and carried her severed head through the streets. His act of brutality, which was praised by the local Muslim townsfolk, is what is known in that region as a “family honor killing.” Because Saana had “disgraced” her husband by running away, she got what she deserved according to Islamic tradition.

At least forty such murders are reported in Israel’s Palestinian territories each year, although the number of actual honor killings is probably much higher. In 1994, one woman was seized in broad daylight in east Jerusalem and stabbed sixteen times in the head and shoulder. Her crime: she had insisted on custody of her children in a complicated divorce case.

In a report released in 2000 by Amnesty International and the United Nations, researchers said as many as one thousand Muslim “honor killings” occurred in Pakistan in 1999. At least four hundred such killings were documented in Yemen in 1997. In a majority of the cases, the UN found that the orders to kill the women came from family members.

The Associated Press reported in July 2000 that the father of one twenty-eight-year-old Pakistani woman who had “disgraced” her family by seeking a divorce from her abusive husband hired an assassin to shoot her. Her father, a prominent businessman in the city of Lahore, was praised by religious and community leaders for killing his daughter.

In Iran, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia, and in other Muslim nations where Western influence is strongly resisted, the human rights of women are extremely limited because of Islamic teachings. Women in some Muslim cultures are often strongly discouraged from pursuing any kind of education, and they are considered to be on the same social level as domesticated animals. Muslim women in these Arab nations have been shot, beheaded, stoned, or poisoned

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for “crimes” such as sitting next to a man on a bus, talking to a man on the telephone, or being raped.

Some Muslim women don’t even have the right to venture out in public. Abassi Madani, leader of the Algerian Islamic Front, was recently asked by *Time* magazine when it was appropriate for a Muslim woman to leave her house. His response: “When she is born, when she is married and when she goes to the cemetery.”

Fundamentalist Islam endorses spouse abuse in its cruelest form. Consider what the Qur’an and other holy **Muslim texts, or hadiths, say about marriage and Allah’s will for women:**

- Men are superior to women (Q 2:228, Q 4:34).
- Women are deficient in intelligence, gratitude, and religion (Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari) and are to be considered “toys” (Hadith No. 919).
- The deception of women is “awesome,” their wickedness is contagious, and bad character and feeble minds are their predominant traits (Hadith Ihy’a ‘Uloum ed-Din).
- The witness of two women is equal to the witness of one man (Q 2:282).
- Women must wear veils, or hijabs, to protect not their own chastity but the chastity of men who might see them (Hadith by Dr. Mohammad Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti).
- A husband’s rights over his wife are divine (Hadith Mishkat al-Masabih).
- It is condescension on the part of the man to spend his life with a woman. She cannot repay this favor, no matter what sacrifice she makes (Hadith by Suyuti).
- A husband who fears rebelliousness in his wife must admonish her first. If that does not work, he has the right to desert her sexually. If that does not work, he may beat her (Q 4:34).
- A footnote in the English translation of the Hadith Mishkat al-Masabih states that a husband may beat his wife mildly if she (1) does not wear “fineries” that he requests, (2) refuses sexual relations without a lawful excuse, (3) is ordered to take a bath to clean herself from impurities for prayer, and refuses, and (4) goes abroad without permission of her husband.
- The Muslim cleric Ibn Kaathir, commenting on a Qu’ranic passage in Q 4:34, says that a man is not to be asked why he beat his wife. It is his unquestionable right.
- Beatings will not only reform “deviations” in behavior but can also be gratifying to women. Some women will not “recognize the power of the man whom they love except when the man conquers them physically” (Sayid Qotb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur’an*, commenting on Q 4:34).

Islam isn’t the only religion that still promotes wife-beating and female subjugation in the twenty-first century. Hinduism, which boasts an estimated 714 million adherents in India alone, also promotes a degrading view of women even though some of its most important deities are powerful goddesses.

Because of the rise of militant religious nationalism, many Hindus in India today still practice barbaric rituals such as *sati*, the ancient tradition of burning women on funeral pyres after their husbands die. Also in many parts of India today, female babies often are killed quietly by their parents because it is considered shameful to give birth to a girl. The United Nations recently reported that up to fifty million girls are missing from India’s population because of infanticide.

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Shouldn't Christianity Be Different?

Compared to the abysmal record of human rights abuses evident in Muslim and Hindu cultures, one would expect the status of women to be higher in nations that have been influenced by the gospel. In most cases this is true—it was the influence of Christianity in the United States, for example, that sparked the movement to give women the vote in 1920.

Similar movements occurred later in Canada (1918), Germany (1918), Sweden (1921), France (1944), and Italy (1945). England granted the vote to women in 1918 but required them to be age thirty, while men could vote at age twenty-one; the voting age was not equalized until 1928. Iraq waited until 1980 to grant women's suffrage. South African black women could not vote until 1994.

Governments have finally recognized that women deserve equal rights, yet in the church the degradation of women through spouse abuse still occurs in the Christian church to an embarrassing extent. Although part of Jesus Christ's mission was to redeem women from the curse and to elevate them to a place of safety and righteous influence, church leaders have not always supported that mission. In many cases we have opposed it.

In New Testament times, women were considered the absolute property of their fathers or husbands. They were less valuable than cattle. This is why the apostle Paul's words to husbands in Ephesians 5:28, "Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies," was such a radical departure from the cultural traditions of the day. The Christian view of husband-wife relationships is one of *equality* and *mutual respect*, not domination, control, and humiliation.

Yet gender prejudice remained entrenched in the church in its earliest days. Throughout the Middle Ages the predominant view among Christians was that women were inferior and should be ruled by their tyrant husbands—and beaten if necessary. Catholic clergy in medieval times endorsed wife-beating for the purpose of discipline, and this was law in France in the thirteenth century. One law stated that men "may be excused for the injuries they inflict on their wives. Provided he neither kills nor maims her, it is legal for a man to beat his wife if she wrongs him."

Although the Protestant Reformation brought a new understanding of the grace of God for salvation, the chief reformers offered little of that grace to women. John Calvin, John Knox, and Martin Luther all displayed blatant chauvinism in their writings, and Luther actually boasted that he hit his wife to correct her.

In Protestant England, wife-beating was a protected act as long as the instrument used was not considered "unreasonable." (One law specified that the stick used to strike a woman could not be thicker than a man's thumb, and some etymologists claim that this evolved into our modern figure of speech, "rule of thumb.") In the United States, lawmakers finally began enacting statutes in the late 1800s that made wife-beating a punishable crime.

Women in the twentieth century gained political rights and equal access in the workplace, yet today spouse abuse is still a widespread problem. The National Council on Domestic Violence says a woman is battered every fifteen seconds in this country. Tragically, the problem also exists in evangelical churches—but it is often swept under a rug because Christian leaders either don't know how to stop it or can't reconcile the problem with their theology. That's because their own teaching about marriage relationships, particularly their philosophy of wives and "biblical submission," is an underlying cause of this ugly dilemma.

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Isn't it time that the church stood up and shined a truly biblical light of truth into the world's dark history of gender bias?

* Not real names.

Chapter 10 Questions for Discussion

1. How would you counsel a woman whose Christian husband is abusing her physically?
2. Explain how you interpret the apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit to your husbands" (NIV).
3. After reading the quotes from Islamic holy books, how would you describe the Muslim view of women? How does this view differ from a Christian view of women?
4. Explain why you think Christians in other time periods actually promoted the practice of wife-beating.

The prophet Joel was not against the daughters prophesying, nor the apostles. . . . So you that persecute the daughters on whom the Spirit of the Lord is poured, and believe them not, you are them that despise prophesying, and so have broken the apostles' command. . . . So be ashamed forever, and let all your mouths be stopped forever, that despise the spirit of prophecy in the daughters, and do cast them into prison, and do hinder the women laborers in the gospel.

—GEORGE FOX, FOUNDER OF THE QUAKER MOVEMENT

Oh, that the ministers of religion would search the original records of God's Word in order to discover whether the general notions of society are not wrong on this subject, and whether God really intended woman to bury her gifts and talents, as she now does.

—CATHERINE BOOTH, COFOUNDER OF THE SALVATION ARMY

It is not enough for women to modestly and quietly seek their own redemption; they must proclaim it, even when that proclamation lays them open to the false charge of immodesty. It is wicked for any human being to shut the mouth of anyone, male or female, who will sound forth a testimony to the truth in these days of apostasy.

—MISSIONARY AND BIBLE EXPOSITOR KATHERINE BUSHNELL
WHO HELPED STOP CHILD PROSTITUTION IN INDIA IN THE LATE 1800S

Between four and five years after my sanctification, on a certain time, an impressive silence fell upon me, and I stood as if someone was about to speak to me, yet I had no such thought in my heart. But to my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I distinctly heard, and most certainly understood, which said to me "Go preach the gospel!" I immediately replied aloud, "No one will believe me." Again I listened, and again the same voice seemed to say—"Preach the gospel. I will put words in your mouth."

—JERENA LEE, THE FIRST WIDELY TRAVELED FEMALE EVANGELIST
IN THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
DURING THE EARLY 1800S⁷

⁷ Grady, J. L. (2013). [*Ten lies the church tells women: how the bible has been misused to keep women in spiritual bondage*](#). Charisma House.

BST EPHESIANS – STOTT

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9. More incentives to righteousness

5:5–21

It is somewhat arbitrary to suggest a break after verse 4 and the beginning of a new paragraph with verse 5, especially when the same topic of sexual morality is being handled in both. Yet verses 3 and 4 seem to belong to the previous section's practical examples of ethical conduct, each consisting of a balancing prohibition and commandment. After them, although verse 5 continues the topic of sex, we become aware that the emphasis has changed. **Paul moves on in his treatment of Christian behaviour from models to motivation, and adds four powerful incentives to righteous living.**

All employers in business and industry know the vital importance of incentives. How can workers be persuaded to work harder and better, and so increase productivity or sales? All kinds of inducement are offered in the form of higher wages, more attractive conditions, bonuses, holidays, recreational and educational facilities, and then retirement and pension prospects. The best incentives are neither material nor selfish, however. Wise employers of labour seek to give their work force a heightened interest in their job, a greater loyalty to the firm, and a feeling of pride in what they are making or selling. **All this bears witness to the nature of men and women, made in God's likeness, who in addition to a job need reasons for doing it, ideals to inspire them and a sense of creative fulfilment.** Not surprisingly, therefore, the Bible which gives us this doctrine of mankind is itself concerned not only with obligation but with motivation. **People know what they ought to do; how can they be motivated to do it? Here is an aspect of the doctrine of sanctification** (that is, of the process of becoming like Christ) which is much emphasized in the Bible and much neglected in the contemporary church.

The apostle has been arguing that because we are God's new society we must adopt new standards, and because we have decisively 'put off' the old life and 'put on' the new, we must wear appropriate clothing. Now he adds more arguments for holiness. The first concerns the solemn certainty of judgment (verses 5–7), the second what he calls 'the fruit of light' (verses 8–14), *i.e.* the implications of being people who belong to the light, the third the nature of wisdom (verses 15–17) and the fourth the fullness of the Holy Spirit (verses 18–21).

ARGUMENTS FOR HOLINESS

1. The certainty of judgment (verses 5–7)

Many reasons are given in the New Testament **why Christian people should abstain from immorality.**

- There is, for example, the trinitarian theology of the human body as created by God, belonging to Christ and indwelt by the Spirit, which Paul develops in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20.
- Then there is the intrinsic inappropriateness of unholy practices in the holy people of God; in other words, sexual licence is simply 'not fitting among saints' (verses 3–4).
- And now there is the fear of judgment. Most immoral people get away with their immorality on earth, but they will not escape detection, conviction and sentence for

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ever. For *be sure of this*, Paul warns, since there is no uncertainty about it, *that no fornicator or impure man* ('person' would be better, for the words though masculine are not intended to limit the reference to men) ... *has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*. We note in passing the remarkable bracketing of Christ and God in this expression. Since the definite article is not repeated, the kingdom is said to belong to him who is both 'Christ' and 'God'. And this divine kingdom is a righteous kingdom, from which all unrighteousness will be excluded.

We must be cautious, however, in our application of this severe statement. It should not be understood as teaching that even a single immoral thought, word or deed is enough to disqualify us from heaven; otherwise, which of us would ever qualify for admission? No; for those who fall into such sins through weakness, but afterwards repent in shame and humility, there is forgiveness. The immoral or impure person envisaged here is one who has given himself up without shame or penitence to this way of life, *one who is covetous* in the sense already defined, namely sexually greedy (4:19; 5:3), *that is*, Paul adds in parenthesis, *an idolater*. **Such people, whose lust has become an idolatrous obsession, will have no share in the perfect kingdom of God.**

Let no one deceive you, the apostle continues. He has himself urged them to acknowledge the truth of divine judgment (*be sure of this*); now he warns them of the *empty words* of false teachers who would persuade them otherwise. **In his day Gnostics were arguing that bodily sins could be committed without damage to the soul, [DO WE HEAR THIS ARGUMENT STILL TODAY?]** and with impunity. In our day there are many deceivers in the world, and even in the church. They teach that God is too kind to condemn everybody, and that everybody will get to heaven in the end, irrespective of their behaviour on earth. But their words are empty and their teaching deceitful. Universalism (*i.e.* universal final salvation) is a lie. The truth is that *because of these things* (these evil, immoral, greedy, idolatrous practices) *the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*. The last phrase is a Hebraism already encountered in **2:2; it means simply 'the disobedient', those who know God's law and wilfully disobey it**. God's wrath falls on such, beginning now, and culminating in the day of judgment.

Therefore, Paul concludes, because God's kingdom is righteous and God's wrath will overtake the unrighteous, *do not associate with them*. The RSV rendering is unfortunate. Paul is not prohibiting all contact or association with such people. Otherwise we could not bring them the good news or seek to restrain them from their evil ways. And we would need to go out of the world altogether, which Christ has forbidden.³ **The Greek word *summetochoi* refers to participation, not just association, and the prohibition means 'do not be partners with them'** (NIV). For if we share in their practices, as Lot was warned in Sodom, we run the risk of sharing in their doom.

It would be easy for Christians to speed-read a paragraph like this, without pausing for reflection, on the assumption that it applies to unbelievers, not to us. Has not Paul assured us in the earlier part of his letter of our heavenly inheritance, taught us that the Holy Spirit within us is God's guarantee, even foretaste and first instalment, of it 'until we acquire possession of it', and prayed that our eyes might be opened to see 'the riches of the glory of the inheritance' which will one day be ours?⁵ Yes, indeed he has. At the same time he also addresses to us this warning about the danger of forfeiting our inheritance in God's kingdom. How can we reconcile these

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things? Only by recalling that assurance of salvation is neither a synonym nor an excuse for presumption. And if we should fall into a life of greedy immorality, we would be supplying clear evidence that we are after all idolaters, not worshippers of God, disobedient people instead of obedient, and so the heirs not of heaven but of hell. The apostle gives us a solemn warning; we shall be wise to heed it.

2. The fruit of light (verses 8–14)

Paul goes on to give an additional reason for not getting involved in the evil conduct of immoral people. He bases it not now on the future (the coming judgment of God) but on the past and the present (the difference between what his readers once were and now are).

The whole paragraph plays on the rich symbolism of darkness and light, 'darkness' representing ignorance, error and evil, 'light' representing truth and righteousness. In 4:17–18 he has portrayed the darkened understanding of pagans. Formerly his readers were the same: *Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*. Notice that he does not say they used to be in darkness, but now were *in* the light. This would have been true, as the New Testament writers say. But what Paul writes here is more striking still: they themselves were actually now 'light'. 'Their lives and not just their environment'⁷ **had been changed from darkness to light**. And this radical transformation had taken place *in the Lord*, by virtue of their union with him who claimed to be the light of the world. So then, because they had become 'light in the Lord', they must *walk as children of light* or 'like people who belong to the light' (GNB). **Their behaviour must conform to their new identity**. [DOES MINE?] They must radiate the light they are, and 'live like men who are at home in daylight' (NEB).

What will this mean in practice? It will mean a life shining with *all that is good and right and true*, for these things are *the fruit of light* (some MSS read 'the fruit of the Spirit' but this is probably an assimilation to Gal. 5:22, and '**the fruit of light**' is the better reading). It is possible that Paul is following the metaphor through and likening the goodness and truth which grow by the light of Christ to a harvest ripening under the sun. Certainly if they are to live consistently as 'children of light', **they will try to learn (dokimazō is to test, discern and approve) what is pleasing to the Lord**. **The light metaphor speaks vividly of Christian openness and transparency, of living joyfully in the presence of Christ, with nothing to hide or fear.**

Unfortunately, however, it is not possible to live in the light and enjoy it, without also adopting some attitude towards those who still live in the darkness, and to their lifestyle. What attitude will this be? Negatively, *take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness*. While the light produces the fruit of goodness and truth, the works of darkness are unfruitful, unproductive, barren; they have no beneficial results. So we are to take no part in them, but *instead*, positively, *expose them*, 'show them up for what they are' (NEB). We may not wish to do this, but we cannot help it, for this is what light invariably does. Besides, evil deeds deserve to be exposed, that is, to be unmasked and rebuked, *for it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret*.

[HOW DOES ONE EXPOSE THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE IN 2022?]

- a. By being light with how we live our lives, out loud. Proactive living.
- b. By loving those caught in darkness. Active friendship.
- c. By voting. Active Community.
- d. By sharing our faith. Wholeness in Jesus.

Verse 13 elaborates the double value of a Christian exposure of evil. First, *when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible*. This is always good. **Darkness hides the ugly realities of**

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evil; the light makes them visible. Then evil is seen for what it is without any possibility of concealment or subterfuge. Secondly, *anything that becomes visible is light*. Paul's economy of words makes it difficult to be certain what he means by this statement. But he seems to be describing a second stage in what light does: **it actually transforms what it illumines into light**. This may mean that Christians who lead a righteous life thereby restrain and reform evildoers, yes, and even convert them. For as their light shines, what it makes visible suddenly *is light*, just as the Ephesians themselves *are light* (verse 8). JBP paraphrases: 'It is possible (after all it happened to you) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light.' If this is correct, then Paul has brought his argument about light and darkness to a fine climax. 'Exposure' sounds negative, showing people up for what they are, judgmental, condemning. And it is that. But the light which exposes has positive evangelistic power also, 'the light of one soul making another light'. For it may bring people, as they see the ugliness of evil, to conviction of their sin and so to penitent faith in Jesus. This, then, is the twofold effect which a Christian's light has on the prevailing darkness: it makes visible and it makes light.

Verse 14 is a natural conclusion. Paul clinches his argument with an apt quotation, which either summarizes the teaching of an Old Testament verse like Isaiah 61:1 (since *legei, it is said*, normally introduces a quotation from Scripture) or, as many modern commentators suggest, is an extract from an Easter or baptismal hymn: *Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light*. Here our former condition in Adam is graphically described in terms of sleep, death and darkness, from all of which Christ rescues us. Conversion is nothing less than awaking out of sleep, rising from death and being brought out of darkness into the light of Christ.

No wonder we are summoned to live a new life in consequence!

[IS THIS FOCUS ON WHAT LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN DOES SETTING UP THE DEBATE OVER WHAT 'HEAD' MEANS LATER?]

3. The nature of wisdom (verses 15–17)

Paul's next little paragraph is based upon two assumptions: first that Christians are *sophoi*,—wise people, not fools—and secondly that Christian wisdom is practical wisdom, for it teaches us how to behave.

His word for to 'behave' throughout the letter has been a Hebrew concept, to 'walk'.

Our Christian walk or behaviour, he has written, **must no longer be according to the world, the flesh and the devil (2:1–3), or like the pagans (4:17).**

[IS THIS SETTING UP THE RESPECT HE WILL BE OUTLINING THAT HUSBANDS MUST HAVE FOR THEIR WIVES...BEING LIGHT AND WITNESSING THROUGH THEIR MARRIAGE EXAMPLE?]

Instead, it must be 'worthy' of God's call, 'in love', and 'as children of light' (4:1; 5:1; 5:8). Now he adds a more general exhortation to us to behave like the wise people he credits us with being: *look carefully how you walk*, he writes. **Everything worth doing requires care.** We all take trouble over the things which seem to us to matter—our job, our education, our home and family, our hobbies, our dress and appearance. So as Christians we must take trouble over our Christian life. We must treat it as the serious thing it is. **'Be most careful then how you conduct yourselves: like sensible men, not like simpletons' (NEB).** **What, therefore, are the marks of wise people who take trouble over their Christian discipleship?**

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First, wise people make the most of their time. The verb *exagorazō* can mean to ‘redeem’ or ‘buy back’, and if used in this way here, the appeal is to ‘ransom the time from its evil bondage’. But probably it means rather to ‘buy up’, in which case RSV is right to translate *making the most of the time*, ‘time’ (*kairos*) referring to every passing opportunity.

Certainly wise people know that time is a precious commodity. All of us have the same amount of time at our disposal, with sixty minutes in every hour and twentyfour hours in every day. None of us can stretch time. But wise people use it to the fullest possible advantage. They know that time is passing, and also that *the days are evil*. So they seize each fleeting opportunity while it is there. For once it has passed, even the wisest people cannot recover it. Somebody once advertised as follows: ‘Lost, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward offered, for they are gone for ever’. By contrast, Jonathan Edwards, the philosopher-theologian who became God’s instrument in the ‘Great Awakening’ in America in 1734–5, wrote in the seventieth of his famous *Resolutions* just before his twentieth birthday: ‘Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.’ He was a wise man, for the first sign of wisdom which Paul gives here is a disciplined use of time.

Secondly, wise people discern the will of God. They are sure that, whereas wilfulness is folly, wisdom is to be found in God’s will and nowhere else. *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is* (verse 17). Jesus himself prayed, ‘Not my will but yours be done,’ and taught us to pray, ‘May your will be done on earth as in heaven.’ Nothing is more important in life than to discover and do the will of God. Moreover, in seeking to discover it, it is essential to distinguish between his ‘general’ and his ‘particular’ will. The former is so called because it relates to the generality of his people and is the same for all of us, *e.g.* to make us like Christ. His particular will, however, extending to the particularities of our life, is different for each of us, *e.g.* what career we shall follow, whether we should marry, and if so whom. Only after this distinction has been made can we consider how we may find out *what the will of the Lord is*. His ‘general’ will is found in Scripture; the will of God for the people of God has been revealed in the Word of God. But we shall not find his ‘particular’ will in Scripture. To be sure, we shall find general principles in Scripture to guide us, but detailed decisions have to be made after careful thought and prayer and the seeking of advice from mature and experienced believers.

4. The fullness of the Holy Spirit (verses 18–21)

Paul has already told his readers that they have been ‘sealed’ with the Holy Spirit, and that they must not ‘grieve’ the Holy Spirit (1:13; 4:30). Now he bids them *be filled with the Spirit*. There is no greater secret of holiness than the infilling of him whose very nature and name are ‘holy’.

Grammatically speaking, this paragraph consists of two imperatives (the commands not to get drunk but to be Spirit-filled), followed by four present participles (speaking, singing, thanking and submitting). Theologically speaking, it first presents us with our Christian duty (to avoid drunkenness but seek the Spirit’s fullness) and then describes four consequences of this spiritual condition, in terms of our relationships. ‘Being filled with the Spirit’ is a topic much discussed and debated today; it is important for us to study Paul’s teaching carefully.

The apostle begins by drawing a certain comparison between drunkenness and the Holy Spirit’s fullness: *Do not get drunk with wine, he says, ... but be filled with the Spirit*. And indeed there is a superficial similarity between the two conditions. A person who is drunk, we say, is

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‘under the influence’ of alcohol; and certainly a Spirit-filled Christian is under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit. But there the comparison ends and the contrast begins. Of course in the heathen cult of Dionysus intoxication was regarded as a means to inspiration. But it is a serious mistake to suppose that to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ is a kind of spiritual inebriation in which we lose control of ourselves. **On the contrary, ‘self-control’ (*enkrateia*) is the final quality named as ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:22–23. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit we do not lose control; we gain it.** It is true that on the day of Pentecost some said the Spirit-filled disciples were drunk; ‘They are filled with new wine.’ These were a minority, however, described by Luke as ‘others’; the majority had no such thought in their minds, but were amazed to hear God’s mighty works being announced in their own languages. It seems that the minority were not even sincere in attributing drunkenness to the Spirit-filled Christians. Luke says they were making fun of them, so that the work of the Holy Spirit was ‘mockingly misinterpreted’.

The first chapter of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ exposition of Ephesians 5:18–6:9, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work*, is entitled ‘The Stimulus of the Spirit’. Writing as both a physician and a pastor, he helpfully compares and contrasts the two states of drunkenness and the Spirit’s fullness. He says: ‘Wine—alcohol—... pharmacologically speaking is not a stimulant—it is a depressant. Take up any book on pharmacology and look up ‘alcohol’, and you will find, always, that it is classified among the depressants. It is not a stimulant’. Further, ‘it depresses first and foremost the highest centres of all in the brain ... They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest’.⁵ What the Holy Spirit does, however, is the exact opposite. ‘If it were possible to put the Holy Spirit into a textbook of Pharmacology, I would put him under the stimulants, for that is where he belongs. He really does stimulate ... He stimulates our every faculty ... the mind and the intellect ... the heart ... and the will ...’

Consider now how Paul paints the contrast. The result of drunkenness, he writes, is debauchery (*asōtia*). People who are drunk give way to wild, dissolute and uncontrolled actions. They behave like animals, indeed worse than animals. The results of being filled with the Spirit are totally different. If excessive alcohol dehumanizes, turning a human being into a beast, the fullness of the Spirit makes us more human, for he makes us like Christ.

The apostle now lists the four beneficial results of being filled with the Spirit.

a. Fellowship: addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (verse 19a)

The familiar AV version of this sentence begins, ‘Speaking to yourselves in psalms ...’ This does not mean that Spirit-filled believers talk to themselves, however, for the Greek use of the reflexive here can equally be translated ‘each other’ (as in 4:32). Nor does it mean that, if we are filled with the Spirit, we stop speaking to one another and start singing to one another instead. No, the reference is to Christian fellowship, and the mention of ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ (which are not easily distinguishable, although the first word implies a musical accompaniment) indicates that **the context is public worship**. Whenever Christians assemble, they love to sing both to God and to each other. Sometimes we sing responsively, as the Jews did in temple and synagogue, and as the early Christians did also, meeting before daybreak ‘to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ as to a god’. Also some of the psalms we sing are in reality not worship of God but mutual exhortation. A good example is Psalm 95, the *Venite*, in the singing of which we

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should turn to one another: 'O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!' **Here is fellowship in worship, a reciprocal invitation to praise.**

b. *Worship: singing and making melody (perhaps the verbs combine vocal and instrumental music) to the Lord with all your heart (verse 19b)*

Here the singing is not 'to one another' but 'to the Lord'. Although RSV may be right in translating the following words 'with all your heart', the Greek phrase probably means 'in your heart' (AV), as in Colossians 3:16, referring to either the sincerity or the inwardness of authentic Christian praise, or both. Perhaps JBP has caught the point with '**making music in your hearts for the ears of the Lord**', an instruction from which unmusical people unable to sing in tune have always derived much comfort. In this case it may be silent worship, although at the same time inwardly joyful and melodious. Without doubt Spirit-filled Christians have a song of joy in their hearts, and Spirit-filled public worship is a joyful celebration of God's mighty acts, though J. Armitage Robinson suggests that Paul 'contrasts the merriment of wine with the sober gladness of sacred psalmody'.⁸

c. *Gratitude: always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father (verse 20)*

The call to thanksgiving is not uncommon in Paul's letters. The grumbling spirit is not compatible with the Holy Spirit. Grumbling was one of the besetting sins of the people of Israel; they were always 'murmuring' against the Lord and against Moses. But the Spirit-filled believer is full not of complaining, but of thanksgiving.

Although the text reads that we are to give thanks *always and for everything*, we must not press these words literally. For we cannot thank God for absolutely 'everything', including blatant evil. The strange notion is gaining popularity in some Christian circles that the major secret of Christian freedom and victory is unconditional praise; that a husband should praise God for his wife's adultery and a wife for her husband's drunkenness; and that even the most appalling calamities of life should become subjects for thanksgiving and praise. Such a suggestion is at best a dangerous half-truth, and at worst ludicrous, even blasphemous. Of course God's children learn not to argue with him in their suffering, but to trust him, and indeed to thank him for his loving providence by which he can turn even evil to good purposes (*e.g.* Rom. 8:28). But that is praising God for being God; it is not praising him for evil. To do this would be to react insensitively to people's pain (when Scripture tells us to weep with those who weep) and to condone and even encourage evil (when Scripture tells us to hate it and to resist the devil). God abominates evil, and we cannot praise or thank him for what he abominates.

So then the 'everything' for which we are to give thanks to God must be qualified by its context, namely *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father*. Our thanksgiving is to be for everything which is consistent with the loving Fatherhood of God and the self-revelation he has given us in Jesus Christ. Once again the doctrine of the Trinity informs and directs our devotion. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we give thanks to God our Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

d. *Submission: be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (verse 21)*

Although RSV begins a new paragraph with this verse, and translates it as an imperative, it is in fact another present participle (*hypotassomenoi*), **dependent on the command 'be filled with the Spirit'**, like the preceding three. Sometimes a person who claims to be filled with the Spirit

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becomes aggressive, self-assertive and brash. But the Holy Spirit is a humble Spirit, and those who are truly filled with him always display the meekness and gentleness of Christ. It is one of their most evident characteristics that they submit to one another.

They also submit to Christ, for their mutual submissiveness is *out of reverence for Christ*, or in more familiar terminology 'in the fear of Christ'. Those who are truly subject to Jesus Christ do not find it difficult to submit to each other as well. Incidentally, this expression 'in the fear of Christ' is a notable if indirect testimony to Paul's belief in the deity of Jesus, since the regular Old Testament requirement was to live 'in the fear of God'. There are several other 'Christianizations' of Old Testament thought in this chapter. For example, God's kingdom is Christ's (verse 5). We are to please Christ and seek his will, just as before Christ people sought God's will and pleasure (verses 10, 17), and worshipping God becomes worshipping Christ (verse 19). For in the last three verses mentioned 'the Lord' is a title for Jesus.

Such are the wholesome results of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They all concern our relationships. If we are filled with the Spirit, we shall be harmoniously related both to God (worshipping him with joy and thanksgiving) and to each other (speaking and submitting to one another). In brief, Spirit-filled believers love God and love each other, which is hardly surprising since the first fruit of the Spirit is love.

We need now to return to the imperative on which these four participles depend, that is, to the Christian duty and privilege from which these four Christian attitudes result. It is the command *Be filled with the Spirit*. The exact form of the verb *plērousthe* is suggestive.

First, it is in the *imperative mood*. 'Be filled' is not a tentative proposal, but an authoritative command. We have no more liberty to avoid this responsibility than the many others which surround it in Ephesians. To be filled with the Spirit is obligatory, not optional.

Secondly, it is in the *plural form*. In other words, it is addressed to the whole Christian community. None of us is to get drunk; all of us are to be Spirit-filled. The fullness of the Spirit is not an élitist privilege, but available for all the people of God.

Thirdly, it is in the *passive voice*. NEB renders it: 'Let the Holy Spirit fill you'. There is no technique to learn and no formula to recite. What is essential is such a penitent turning from what grieves the Holy Spirit and such a believing openness to him that nothing hinders him from filling us. It is significant that the parallel passage in Colossians reads not 'Let the Spirit fill you' but 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (3:16). We must never separate the Spirit and the Word. To obey the Word and to surrender to the Spirit are virtually identical.

Fourthly, it is in the *present tense*. In Greek there are two kinds of imperative, an aorist describing a single action, and a present when the action is continuous. Thus, when Jesus said during the wedding reception at Cana, 'Fill the jars with water' (Jn. 2:7), the imperative is aorist, since the jars were to be filled only once. **But when Paul says to us, 'Be filled with the Spirit', he uses a present imperative, implying that we are to go on being filled.** For the fullness of the Spirit is not a once-for-all experience which we can never lose, **but a privilege to be renewed continuously by continuous believing and obedient appropriation.** We have been 'sealed' with the Spirit once and for all; we need to be filled with the Spirit and go on being filled every day and every moment of the day.

Here, then, is a message for both the defeated and the complacent, that is, for Christians at opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum. To the defeated Paul would say, 'Be filled with the Spirit,

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and he will give you a new love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control.' To the complacent Paul would say 'go on being filled with the Spirit. Thank God for what he has given you thus far. But do not say you have arrived. For there is more, much more, yet to come.'

IV. New relationships

Ephesians 5:21–6:24

10. Husbands and Wives

5:21–33

Paul has been outlining the **new standards which God expects of his new society, the church, especially in terms of its unity and purity.** These two qualities are indispensable to a life which is both worthy of the calling and fitting to the status of the people of God. He moves on now to the new relationships in which God's new people inevitably find themselves, and in so doing he concentrates in the rest of his letter on two further dimensions of Christian living.

- A. The first concerns the practical, down-to-earth relationships of the home. For the divine family ceases to be a credible concept if it is not itself subdivided into human families which display God's love. What is the point of peace in the church if there is no peace in the home?
- B. The second dimension concerns the enemy we face and therefore the equipment we need in our unremitting spiritual warfare.

These two responsibilities (home and work on the one hand, and spiritual combat on the other) are quite different from each other. Husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants are visible, tangible human beings, while the 'principalities and powers' arrayed against us are invisible, intangible demonic beings. **Nevertheless, if our Christian faith is to be of any practical value, it must be able to cope with both situations.** It must teach us how to behave Christianly at home and at work, and it must enable us to fight against evil in such a way that we stand and do not fall. Thus harmony in the home and stability in the fight are the two final topics which the apostle handles.

Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants were to be found in the earliest Christian congregations. **Moreover, these three pairs of relationship are basic to all human existence.** Markus Barth expresses this well by suggesting that in the

first we see the human person as 'a sexual being (before Dr Freud or Dr Kinsey had put their fingers on this fact)',

in the second as 'a temporal being (tied to the generation to which he belongs)'

and in the third as 'a material being and part of an economic structure', Paul thus anticipating Marx. 'So this is man: a sexual, temporal and material being who, without exception, is enmeshed and, as it seems, hopelessly trapped in the structures of these three dimensions.'

Detailed, practical instruction on Christian family life and on Christian responsibility in what nowadays we call 'employment' seems to have been given by the apostles from the beginning. Examples occur in the letters of both Paul and Peter. There is an urgent need in our day for similar plain moral education. Too much so-called 'holiness teaching' emphasizes a personal relationship to Jesus Christ without any attempt to indicate its consequences in terms of relationships with the people we live and work with. In contrast to such holiness-in-a-vacuum, which magnifies

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experiences and minimizes ethics, the apostles spelled out Christian duty in the concrete situations of everyday life and work.

Luther in his *Catechism* seems to have been the first person to refer to these lists as *Haustafeln*, meaning literally 'house tables' but often translated 'tables of household duties'. In recent years scholars have compared them with similar precepts both in the Jewish *halakah* (their corpus of law and tradition) and in Gentile literature, especially of the Stoics. That Jews, Stoics and Christians should all have been concerned about moral behaviour in the home should not surprise us. But the similarity between their *Haustafeln* has sometimes been exaggerated. If the apostles of Jesus were conscious of taking over any material from Jewish or Gentile sources, they thoroughly Christianized what they borrowed. There is no better example of this than Paul's address to husbands and wives in Ephesians, which is based upon a developed doctrine of Christ and his church.

1. Authority and submission

The RSV may be right to begin the new paragraph with verse 21: *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ*. **We have seen that the Greek verb is a present participle ('submitting') like 'addressing one another', 'singing and making melody' (verse 19) and 'giving thanks' (verse 20), and that all four participles depend on the command 'be filled with the Spirit' (verse 18) and describe the consequences of the Holy Spirit's fullness.** Nevertheless, a Greek participle was sometimes used as an imperative, and undoubtedly the demand for mutual submissiveness leads on to the submission asked from wives, children and slaves. **Moreover, there is no verb at all in verse 22, because the call for submission in verse 21 is intended to be carried over into it.** So verse 21 is in fact a transition verse, forming a bridge between two sections, which is why the NEB puts it in a paragraph by itself.

What is beyond question is that the three paragraphs which follow are given as examples of Christian submission, and that the emphasis throughout is on submission.

Thus, wives are addressed before their husbands and are told to *be subject* to them (verse 22);

children are mentioned before their parents and are told to *obey* them (6:1);

and slaves are addressed before their masters and are told to *be obedient* to them (6:5).

Now the very notion of submission to authority is out of fashion today. It is totally at variance with contemporary attitudes of permissiveness and freedom. Almost nothing is calculated to arouse more angry protest than talk of 'subjection'. Ours is an age of liberation (not least for women, children and workers), and anything savouring of oppression is deeply resented and strongly resisted. How are Christians to react to this modern mood?

Our initial reaction to these liberation movements, I do not hesitate to say (although I shall qualify it later), should be one of positive welcome. For we have to agree that women in many cultures have been exploited, being treated like servants in their own home; that children have often been suppressed and squashed, not least in Victorian England in which they were supposed to be 'seen and not heard'; and that workers have been unjustly treated, being given inadequate wages and working conditions, and an insufficient share in responsible decision-making, not to mention the appalling injustices and barbarities of slavery and the slave trade.

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We who name Christ's name need to acknowledge with shame that we ourselves have often acquiesced in the *status quo* and so helped to perpetuate some forms of human oppression, instead of being in the vanguard of those seeking social change. Nothing in the paragraphs we are about to study is inconsistent with the true liberation of human beings from all humiliation, exploitation and oppression. On the contrary, to whom do women, children and workers chiefly owe their liberation? Is it not to Jesus Christ? It is Jesus Christ who treated women with courtesy and honour in an age in which they were despised. It is Jesus Christ who said 'Let the children come to me' in a period of history in which unwanted babies were consigned to the local rubbish dump (as they are today to the hospital incinerator), or abandoned in the forum for anybody to pick up and rear for slavery or prostitution. And it is Jesus Christ who taught the dignity of manual labour by working himself as a carpenter, washing his disciples' feet and saying, 'I am among you as one who serves.'

So then, we must not interpret what Paul writes to wives, children and servants in his *Haustafeln* about submission in a way which contradicts these fundamental attitudes of Jesus. Nor should we make Paul contradict himself, as some writers do, for to do this in biblical exegesis is a counsel of despair. No, we must set the *Haustafeln* squarely within the framework of the Ephesian letter, in which Paul has been describing the single new humanity which God is creating through Christ.

- He has been emphasizing the complete oneness in Christ of people of all cultures, especially Jew and Gentile, while in his parallel letter to the Colossians he has added slave and free man (3:11) and in an earlier letter male and female (Gal. 3:28).
- We may be quite sure that in his *Haustafeln* he does not now destroy his own thesis by erecting new barriers of sex, age and rank in God's new society in which they have been abolished. We must give the apostle credit for a little consistency of thought and allow him to explain himself.

In the light of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles, we may confidently and repeatedly affirm at least three relevant truths:

first, the *dignity* of womanhood, childhood and servanthood;

secondly, the *equality* before God of all human beings, irrespective of their race, rank, class, culture, sex or age, because all are made in his image;

and the even deeper *unity* of all Christian believers, as fellow-members of God's family and of Christ's body. It is only when these truths are firmly kept in the forefront of our minds that we are ready to consider the teaching of the *Haustafeln*. [Household code]

Negatively, the submission which Paul enjoins on wives, children and servants is not another word for inferiority. Positively it is important to grasp the difference which Luther and his followers rightly make between persons on the one hand and their roles on the other. Here is one of Luther's expositions of this theme: 'I have often said that we must sharply distinguish between these two, the office and the person. The man who is called Hans or Martin is a man quite different from the one who is called elector or doctor or preacher. Here we have two different persons in one man. The one is that in which we are created and born, according to which we are all alike—man or woman or child, young or old. But once we are born, God adorns and dresses you up as another person. He makes you a child and me a father, one a master and another a servant, one a prince and another a citizen.'

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Once we see this distinction, then those who hold an office—whether rulers, magistrates, husbands, parents or employers—have a certain God-given authority which they expect others to acknowledge. Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants have equal dignity as God-like beings, but different God-appointed roles. As J. H. Yoder succinctly puts it, ‘Equality of *worth* is not identity of *role*’. The husband, the parent and the master have been invested with an authority to which others should submit.

Two questions immediately arise about this authority: Where does it come from? And how is it to be used?

In answer to the first question we reply that it comes from God. The God of the Bible is a God of order, and in his ordering of human life (*e.g.* in the state and the family) he has established certain authority or leadership roles. And since such authority, though exercised by human beings, is delegated to them by God, others are required conscientiously to submit to it. The Greek words imply this, for at the heart of *hypotassomai* (‘submit’) is *taxis* (‘order’). Submission is a humble recognition of the divine ordering of society. This is plainly taught in Paul’s *Haustafeln*. He tells wives to be submissive to their husbands *as to the Lord* (verse 22), children to obey their parents *in the Lord* (6:1), and slaves to be obedient to their earthly masters *as to Christ* (6:5). That is, behind the husband, the parent and the master they must discern the Lord himself who has given them their authority. Then, if they wish to submit to him, they will submit to them, since it is his authority which they exercise. The same is true of the mutual submission expected of all Christian people. **It is *out of reverence for Christ* that we are to submit to one another, the Christ who both wields authority as Lord and humbled himself as servant.**

We have to be very careful not to overstate this biblical teaching on authority. It does not mean that the authority of husbands, parents and masters is unlimited, or that wives, children and workers are required to give unconditional obedience. **No, the submission required is to God’s authority delegated to human beings. If, therefore, they misuse their God-given authority (*e.g.* by commanding what God forbids or forbidding what God commands), then our duty is no longer conscientiously to submit, but conscientiously to refuse to do so. For to submit in such circumstances would be to disobey God. The principle is clear: we must submit right up to the point where obedience to human authority would involve disobedience to God.** At that point ‘civil disobedience’ becomes our Christian duty. In order to submit to God, we have to refuse to submit to human beings. As Peter put it to the Sanhedrin: ‘We must obey God rather than men.’ This is the exception, however. The general rule on which the New Testament insists is humble submission to God-given authority.

To the second question about the use of divinely delegated authority, we reply that it must **never be used selfishly**, but always for those others for whose benefit it has been given. Perhaps the most striking feature of the *Haustafeln* is that in each pair of relationships reciprocal duties are laid down. It is true that wives are to submit to their husbands, children to their parents and slaves to their masters, and that this requirement **of submission (*hypotagē*) presupposes an authority (*exousia*) in the husbands, parents and masters. Indeed, these two Greek words complement each other. Yet the word *exousia* is not used once in the passage. When Paul is describing the duties of husbands, parents and masters, in no case is it authority which he tells them to exercise.** On the contrary, explicitly or implicitly, he warns them against the improper use of their authority, forbids them to exploit their position, and urges them instead to remember

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their responsibilities and the other party's rights. Thus, husbands are to love their wives and care for them, parents are not to provoke their children but bring them up sensitively, and masters are not to threaten their slaves, but treat them with justice.

It has seemed necessary, before coming to the actual text of the *Haustafeln*, to open up in a general way this topic of submission to authority. To sum up, 'authority' in biblical usage is not a synonym for 'tyranny'. All those who occupy positions of authority in society are responsible both to the God who has entrusted it to them and to the person or persons for whose benefit they have been given it. In a word, the biblical concept of authority spells not tyranny but responsibility.

The first responsibilities which Paul elaborates are those of husbands and wives. The essence of his teaching is clear. Wives are to 'submit', and husbands are to 'love'.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.* ²⁴ *As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.* ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* ²⁶ *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷ *that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* ²⁸ *Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,* ³⁰ *because we are members of his body.* ³¹ *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'* ³² *This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church;* ³³ *however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

2. The duty of wives (verses 22–24)

Two reasons are given, or at least implied, for the wife's submission to her husband. The first is drawn from creation and concerns the husband's 'headship' of his wife, while the second is drawn from redemption and concerns Christ's 'headship' of the church.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife ... (verses 22–23a). The husband's headship is both stated as a fact and made the ground of his wife's submission. But its origin is not elaborated here. For a fuller understanding of Paul's argument we need to turn elsewhere, especially to 1 Corinthians 11:3–12 and 1 Timothy 2:11–13. In both these passages he goes back to the narrative of Genesis 2 and points out that woman was made after man, out of man and for man. He adds that man is also born from woman, so that man and woman are dependent on one another. Nevertheless, his emphasis is on the order, mode and purpose of the creation of Eve. And since it is mainly on these facts of creation that Paul bases his case for the husband's headship, his argument has permanent and universal validity, and is not to be dismissed as culturally limited. The cultural elements of his teaching are to be found in the applications of the principle, in the requirement of 'veiling' certainly, and I think also in the requirement of 'silence'. But the man's (and especially the husband's) 'headship' is not a cultural application of a principle; it is the foundation principle itself. This is not chauvinism, but creationism. **The new creation in Christ frees us from the distortion of relations between the sexes caused by the fall (e.g. Gn. 3:16), but it establishes the original intention of the creation. It was to this 'beginning' that Jesus himself went back (e.g. Mt. 19:4–6).** He

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confirmed the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2. So must we. What creation has established, no culture is able to destroy.

This is also why we should reject the facile argument that since slavery has been abolished, the wife's submission should by analogy be abolished too. If this were the case, then why not complete the trio and abolish a child's obedience as well? No, the parallels are inexact. Slavery is a dehumanizing institution, with no justification in any biblical doctrine. A husband's headship, however, is rooted in creation.

Turning from biblical revelation to contemporary experience, Christians will agree that our human sexuality is part and parcel of our humanness. Masculinity and femininity represent a profound distinction which is psychological as well as physiological. Of course the sexes are equal before God, but this does not mean that they are identical. God himself created man male and female in his likeness. **So both equally bear his image, but each also complements the other.** The biblical perspective is to hold simultaneously the equality and the complementarity of the sexes. 'Partnership' is a good word too, so long as it is remembered that the contribution which each brings to it is not identical but distinctive. Hence a man finds himself by being a man, and a woman finds herself by being a woman. Genuine self-discovery and self-fulfilment do not come from striving to be somebody else or from imitating the opposite sex.

What then are the complementary distinctives of the two sexes? The biblical teaching is that God has given to man (and specially to the husband in the marriage relationship) a certain headship, and that his wife will find herself and her true God-given role not in rebellion against him or his headship, but in a voluntary and joyful submission.

The modern understanding of sexual differentiation tends to confirm this biblical teaching. This at least is the thesis of the American sociologist Professor Steven Goldberg in his book *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*. Although it is a conscious response to the feminist movement, he claims that his approach is scientific and not ideological, in that he rests his case on empirical evidence. Nor is his viewpoint to be dismissed as masculine, for the distinguished American anthropologist Dr Margaret Mead is quoted on the book's dust cover as supporting its thesis: 'All the claims so glibly made about societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed.'

The first part of his book is an anthropological study whose conclusion he expresses as follows: 'In every society that has ever existed one finds patriarchy (males fill the overwhelming percentage of upper hierarchical positions in political and all other hierarchies), male attainment (males attain the high-status roles, whatever these may be in any given society) and male dominance (both males and females feel that dominance in male-female encounters and relationships resides in the male, and social expectations and authority systems reflect this).' He is at pains to point out that he is neither making any value judgments, nor measuring performance, nor pronouncing either sex 'superior' or 'inferior' to the other; his purpose is simply to show that 'patriarchy', 'male dominance' and 'male attainment'—in the technical sense in which he employs these terms—are 'three universal realities', since 'in no society, anywhere or at any time, have these realities been absent'.³

[BY GOD'S DESIGN OR BECAUSE MEN CAN PHYSICALLY OVERPOWER WOMEN?]

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For the development of his second thesis Dr Goldberg moves from anthropology to physiology. He argues that the anthropological evidence for male dominance which he has marshalled has a physiological cause. The 'three universal realities' are the manifestation in society of a basic male drive (often called 'aggression', though Dr Goldberg prefers 'dominance tendency'), which is itself 'neuro-endocrinological' in origin. 'At its most basic, the hypothesis at the core of the theory presented here simply states that there are neuro-endocrinological differences between men and women that engender different male and female responses to the environment and, therefore, different male and female behaviour'. He is not denying that our genetic code interacts with our environment and upbringing, nor that there are individual exceptions to his generalization, nor that many women are frustrated because they lack opportunities to use their gifts. Instead, he is asserting that there are basic differences between masculinity and femininity, that masculinity means drive for dominance, and that 'dominance tendency is primarily a result of hormonal development and not primarily of anatomy, gender identity or the socialization that reflects anatomy and gender identity'.⁵

A Christian who reads Professor Goldberg's thesis wants to state it theologically in terms of creation. God has made and makes men and women different, and one of their basic differences lies in the 'headship' which he has given to man. This may well have a genetic basis. If so, man's natural 'drive' needs to be controlled if his 'headship' is to be constructive. For 'patriarchy' sounds paternalistic and 'male dominance' oppressive. Even the biblical word 'submission' is often expounded as if it were a synonym for 'subjection', 'subordination' and even 'subjugation'. All these words have emotive associations. 'Submission' is no exception. We have to try to disinfect it of these and to penetrate into its essential biblical meaning. This we shall discover neither from its modern associations nor even from its etymology

(WHAT????? WE MUST KNOW WHAT WORD IS BEING USED, THE MEANING OF THE GREEK WORD TO UNDERSTAND WHAT PAUL MEANT!)

but primarily from the way it is used in its context in Ephesians 5.

- There is little doubt what 'submission' meant in the ancient world in which disdain for women was almost universal. William Barclay sums it up: 'The Jews had a low view of women. In the Jewish form of morning prayer there was a sentence in which a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him "a Gentile, a slave or a woman" ... In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely in her husband's possession to do with as he willed ... The position was worse in the Greek world ... The whole Greek way of life made companionship between man and wife next to impossible. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere ... In Greece, home and family life were near to being extinct, and fidelity was completely non-existent ... In Rome in Paul's day the matter was still worse ... The degeneracy of Rome was tragic ... It is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere of the ancient world was adulterous ... The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown.' Charles Seltman confirms this. In the Roman Empire, he writes, 'A girl was completely under her father's, a wife completely under her husband's, power. She was his chattel ... Her life was one of legal incapacity

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which amounted to enslavement, while her status was described as ‘imbecilitas’, whence our word.’ True, this was not the whole picture. Markus Barth tries to redeem the balance: ‘There was also a counter-movement which promoted equal rights for females’, while ‘different periods and different geographical areas produced differing views’. As for Ephesus and its environment, ‘The cult of the Great Mother and the Artemis Temple stamped this city more than others as a bastion and bulwark of women’s rights.’ Nevertheless, the oppression of women prevailed in the ancient world, and their emancipation had scarcely begun. It is against this dark background that Paul’s teaching shines with such a bright light. Yet we still have to ask precisely what is meant by ‘headship’ and ‘submission’.

To begin with, these words do not by themselves establish stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviour. Different cultures assign different tasks to men and women, husbands and wives. In the West, for example, it has long been conventional for the wife to do the shopping, cooking and cleaning, together with the feeding, bathing, nappy-changing and minding of babies. In many parts of Africa and Asia the women also work in the fields and carry heavy loads on their heads. Nowadays, however, and rightly, these conventions are recognized as cultural and are therefore being challenged and in some cases changed. Many couples are learning to share the household chores.

In order to understand the nature of the husband’s headship in the new society which God has inaugurated, we need to look at Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the context in which Paul uses and develops the words ‘headship’ and ‘submission’. Although he grounds the fact of the husband’s headship in creation, he defines it in relation to the headship of Christ the redeemer: *for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour* (verse 23). Now Christ’s headship of his church has already been described in 4:15–16. It is from Christ as head that the body derives its health and grows into maturity. His headship expresses care rather than control, responsibility rather than rule. This truth is endorsed by the surprising addition of the words *and is himself its Saviour*. The head of the body is the saviour of the body; the characteristic of his headship is not so much lordship as saviourhood.

[THE SAVIOR IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAVE. THAT DELINIATION IN THIS VERSE IS ABOUT CHRIST, NOT THE HUSBAND BEING savior WITH A SMALL “s”.]

If the husband’s headship of the wife resembles Christ’s of his church, then the wife’s submission will resemble the church’s: *As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands* (verse 24). There is nothing demeaning about this, for her submission is not to be an unthinking obedience to his rule but rather a grateful acceptance of his care. To quote Markus Barth again: ‘The submission to, and respect for the husband, to which the wife is specifically admonished ... is by no means the submissiveness of a pussycat or a crouching dog ... Paul ... is thinking of a, voluntary, free, joyful and thankful partnership, as the analogy of the relationship of the church to Christ shows.’ Whenever the husband’s headship mirrors the headship of Christ, then the wife’s submission to the protection and provision of his love, far from detracting from her womanhood, will positively enrich it.

[THIS SOUNDS LIKE HE IS SAYING A WOMAN'S SALVATION IS THROUGH HER HUSBAND/FATHER????? THAT IS A LIE & NOT BIBLICAL AT ALL!!!!!!]

3. The duty of husbands (verses 25–33)

If the word which characterizes the wife's duty is 'submit', the word characterizing the husband's is 'love'. We might think that nature itself would teach husbands this priority obligation, but many cultures both ancient and modern prove the contrary. Of course a certain tie of affection and desire binds every married couple together, and Paul's Stoic contemporaries taught husbands to 'love'. But the verb they used was the weak word *phileō*; it was Christian teaching which introduced strong, sacrificial '*agapē*-love' into marriage. Paul uses two analogies to illustrate the tender care which a husband's love for his wife should involve.

The first is that the husband must love his wife as Christ has loved his church. Already in the Old Testament the gracious covenant which God made with his people Israel was many times referred to as a marriage covenant. Jesus took over this teaching and boldly referred to himself as the Bridegroom.² Paul enlarges on the image here and in 2 Corinthians 11:1–3, while in the Revelation we are permitted glimpses of the glorified church 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' and of the coming 'marriage supper of the Lamb'.

What stands out in Paul's development of the theme is the sacrificial steadfastness of the heavenly Bridegroom's covenant-love for his bride. It is this which husbands are to imitate: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her.*

It will be observed that Paul uses five verbs to indicate the unfolding stages of Christ's commitment to his bride, the church. He *loved* her, *gave himself up* for her, to *sanctify* her, having *cleansed* her, that he might *present* her to himself. The statement is so complete and comprehensive that some scholars think it may be a quotation from an early Christian confession, liturgy or hymn. It seems to trace Christ's care for his church from a past to a future eternity. Certainly the words *Christ loved the church*, preceding as they do his self-sacrifice on her behalf, seem to look back to his eternal pre-existence in which he set his love on his people and determined to come to save them. So, having loved the church, he *gave himself up for her*. The reference is, of course, primarily to the cross.

But why did Jesus Christ do it? What was the purpose of his sacrifice? It was *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her*. Perhaps there is a deliberate allusion to the bridal bath which took place before both Jewish and Greek weddings. **The tenses of the verbs suggest that the cleansing of the church precedes her consecration or sanctification.** Indeed, the cleansing seems to refer to the initial purification or cleansing from sin and guilt which we receive when we first repent and believe in Jesus. It is accomplished *by the washing of water with the word*, or more simply 'by water and word' (NEB). The 'washing of water' is an unambiguous reference to baptism,⁴ while the additional reference to 'the word' indicates that baptism is no magical or mechanical ceremony, but needs an explanatory word to define its significance, express the promises of cleansing and new life in the Spirit which it symbolizes, and arouse our faith. True, some think 'the word' alludes to the candidate's confession of faith or appeal for a clear conscience,⁶ rather than to the minister's preaching of the gospel or formula of administration. But it seems more natural to take 'water' and 'word' together as being both administered to the

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candidate. So when Calvin reached this verse in his expository series, he urged care 'that we do not separate the sacraments from the Word at any time', for 'to have the sign without the promise added to it is but a frustratory and unprofitable thing'. Markus Barth rather delightfully argues that in the context the word of promise can be no other than 'I love you'. He goes on: 'The Messiah as the Bridegroom ... says this decisive "word" to his Bride and thereby privately and publicly, decently and legally binds himself to her and her to him.'⁸ It is a solemn word of covenant love.

Having cleansed his bride by water and word, the heavenly Bridegroom's plan is to *sanctify* her and finally to *present* her to himself. The 'sanctification' appears to refer to the present process of making her holy in character and conduct by the power of the indwelling Spirit, while the 'presentation' is eschatological, and will take place when Christ returns to take her to himself. He will present her to himself *in splendour (endoxon)*. The word may hint at the bride's beautiful wedding dress, since it is used of clothing. But it means more than this. 'Glory' (*doxa*) is the radiance of God, the shining forth and manifestation of his otherwise hidden being. So too the church's true nature will become apparent. On earth she is often in rags and tatters, stained and ugly, despised and persecuted. But one day she will be seen for what she is, nothing less than the bride of Christ, 'free from spots, wrinkles or any other disfigurement' (JBP), *holy and without blemish*, beautiful and glorious. It is to this constructive end that Christ has been working and is continuing to work. The bride does not make herself presentable; it is the bridegroom who labours to beautify her in order to present her to himself. His love and self-sacrifice for her, his cleansing and sanctifying of her, are all designed for her liberation and her perfection, when at last he presents her to himself in her full glory. Dr Lloyd-Jones writes: 'Dare I put it like this? The Beauty-Specialist will have put his final touch to the church, the massaging will have been so perfect that there will not be a single wrinkle left. She will look young, and in the bloom of youth, with colour in her cheeks, with her skin perfect, without any spots or wrinkles. And she will remain like that for ever and ever.'

This, then, is Paul's exposition of the implications of Christ's headship. The church's head is the church's bridegroom. He does not crush the church. Rather he sacrificed himself to serve her, in order that she might become everything he longs for her to be, namely herself in the fullness of her glory. Just so a husband should never use his headship to crush or stifle his wife, or frustrate her from being herself. His love for her will lead him to an exactly opposite path. He will give himself for her, in order that she may develop her full potential under God and so become more completely herself.

After climbing with Paul to these sublime heights of romantic love, many readers sense an anti-climax in verse 28: *Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies*. For in his instruction to husbands to love their wives he seems to descend from the lofty standard of Christ's love to the rather low standard of self-love. This sense of anomaly has led some commentators to try to translate the sentence differently, but their attempts do not succeed because the next sentence stubbornly refuses to convey any meaning but the obvious one: *He who loves his wife loves himself*. The probable explanation for Paul's descent to the more mundane level of self-love is that he is always a realist. We cannot fully grasp the greatness of Christ's love; it 'surpasses knowledge', as he wrote earlier. Nor do husbands find it easy to apply this standard to the realities of family life. But we all know from everyday experience how we

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love ourselves. Hence the practical usefulness of the 'golden rule' Jesus enunciated that we should treat others as we would ourselves like to be treated. For we all know this instinctively. It is after all the way we treat ourselves. *For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it* (verse 29a). That is, he feeds it and (it may mean) clothes it, or at any rate looks after it.

This exhortation to a husband to 'nourish and cherish' his wife as he does his own body is more than a useful guide to daily behaviour, however. It also contains an inner appropriateness, since he and his wife have in fact become 'one flesh'. Yet God intends sexual intercourse not only to be a union of bodies, but to symbolize and express a union of personalities. It is when husband and wife become thus deeply one with each other that truly *he who loves his wife loves himself*.

This leads the apostle to return in his thought to Christ and so to reach the climax of his argument. So far he has used two analogies for a husband's love of his wife, namely Christ's loving sacrifice for his bride the church, and the husband's loving care of his own body. Now he fuses the two. Christ's bride and Christ's body are the same (see verse 23), *because we are members of his body* (verse 30). He has incorporated us into himself, made us part of himself in a profound, indissoluble union. This leads Paul to quote Genesis 2:24: *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh* (verse 31) and to declare that *this mystery is a profound one* (verse 32). There seems no reason to doubt that in the first instance he is referring to the mysterious and sacred depths of sexual union itself. But then he immediately goes on to its yet deeper symbolism: *I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church*. In doing so, he not only uses the *egō* of his apostolic authority but actually employs the very expression *egō de legō* ('but I say') which Jesus himself used in the six antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. It is appropriate for him to do so because a 'mystery' is a revealed truth, and the profound 'mystery' here, namely the church's union with Christ, is closely akin to that of Jewish-Gentile unity in the body of Christ, which had been revealed to him and of which he has written in 3:1–6. He thus sees the marriage relationship as a beautiful model of the church's union in and with Christ. When applied to Christ and his church, the 'one flesh' is identical with the 'one new man' of 2:15. Indeed, the three pictures of the church which Paul develops in Ephesians—the body, the building and the bride—all emphasize the reality of its unity on account of its union with Christ.

Verse 33 is a succinct summary of the fuller teaching which Paul has been giving to husbands and wives: *Let each one of you love his wife as himself, for she and he have become one, and let the wife see that she respects her husband*. It is true that 'respects' translates *phobētai*, meaning literally 'fears', but this verb 'may express the emotion of fear in all its modifications and in all its degrees from simple respect through reverence up to adoration, according to its object'. The apostle began with one couplet 'love' and 'submission'. He ends with another 'love' and 'respect'. We have seen that the love he has in mind for the husband sacrifices and serves with a view to enabling his wife to become what God intends her to be. So the 'submission' and 'respect' he asks of the wife express her response to his love and her desire that he too will become what God intends him to be in his 'leadership'.

4. Summary

Taking the husband first, what Paul stresses is not his authority over his wife, but his love for her. Rather, his authority is defined in terms of loving responsibility. To our minds the word 'authority'

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suggests power, dominion and even oppression. We picture the 'authoritative' husband as a domineering figure who makes all the decisions himself, issues commands and expects obedience, inhibits and suppresses his wife, and so prevents her from growing into a mature or fulfilled person. But this is not at all the kind of 'headship' which the apostle is describing, whose model is Jesus Christ. Certainly, 'headship' implies a degree of leadership and initiative, as when Christ came to woo and to win his bride. But more specifically it implies sacrifice, self-giving for the sake of the beloved, as when Christ gave himself for his bride. If 'headship' means 'power' in any sense, then it is power to care not to crush, power to serve not to dominate, power to facilitate self-fulfilment, not to frustrate or destroy it. And in all this the standard of the husband's love is to be the cross of Christ, on which he surrendered himself even to death in his selfless love for his bride. Dr Lloyd-Jones has a striking way of enforcing this truth. 'How many of us', he asks, 'have realized that we are always to think of the married state in terms of the doctrine of the atonement? Is that our customary way of thinking of marriage?... Where do we find what the books have to say about marriage? Under which section? Under Ethics. But it does not belong there. We must consider marriage in terms of the doctrine of the atonement.'

As for the wife's duty in the marriage relationship, it surprises me how unpopular this passage is among many women. When it is read at a wedding and it provokes a feminine outcry, I find myself wondering how carefully it has been read and in particular whether it has been read in its total context. Let me spell out five points which will, I hope, demonstrate that it is not the blueprint for oppression which many think, but rather a charter of genuine liberty.

a. The requirement of submission is a particular example of a general Christian duty

That is, the injunction 'wives submit' (verse 22) is preceded by the requirement that we are to 'submit to one another' (verse 21). If, therefore, it is the wife's duty as wife to submit to her husband, it is also the husband's duty as a member of God's new society to submit to his wife. Submissiveness is a universal Christian obligation. Throughout the Christian church, including every Christian home, submissiveness is to be mutual. For Jesus Christ himself is the paragon of humility. He emptied himself of his status and his rights, and humbled himself to serve. So in the new order which he had founded he calls all his followers to follow in his footsteps. 'Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility towards one another.' Should not the wife even rejoice that she has the privilege of giving a particular demonstration in her attitude to her husband of the beauty of humility which is to characterize all members of God's new society?

This is specially so when it is seen that her self-humbling is not coerced but free. It must have been very obvious in the ancient world. The wife had no status and few rights, as we have seen. Yet the apostle addresses her as a free moral agent and calls upon her not to acquiesce in a fate she cannot escape, but to make a responsible decision before God. It is this which 'begins the revolutionary innovation in the early Christian style of ethical thinking.' Voluntary Christian self-submission is still very significant today. 'Jesus Christ demonstrates rather than loses his dignity by his subordination to the Father. When a person is voluntarily amenable to another, gives way to him, and places himself at his service, he shows greater dignity and freedom than an individual who cannot bear to be a helper and partner to anyone but himself. Ephesians 5 supports anything but blind obedience or the breaking of the wife's will. Rather, this chapter shows that in the realm of the crucified Servant-Messiah, the subjects respect an order of freedom and equality in which one person assists another—seemingly by renouncing rights possessed, actually in exercising the

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right to imitate the Messiah himself ... A greater, wiser, and more positive description of marriage has not yet been found in Christian literature.'

b. The wife's submission is to be given to a lover, not to an ogre

The apostle's instruction is not 'Wives submit, husbands boss'; it is 'Wives submit, husbands love'. Of course there have been examples in every age and culture of cruel and tyrannical husbands, and there have been painful occasions in which in order to maintain the integrity of her conscience, a wife has been obliged to resist her husband's authority. But Paul is describing the Christian ideal, not hideous deviations from it. This has always been obvious to commentators. Back in the sixteenth century Calvin preached. 'Husbands ... should not be cruel towards their wives, or think all things that they please to be permissible and lawful, for their authority should rather be a companionship than a kingship.' Three times the apostle repeats his fundamental charge: *husbands, love your wives* (verse 25); *husbands should love their wives* (verse 28); *let each one of you love his wife* (verse 33). If then the husband's headship is expressed in responsible love for his wife, why should she be reluctant to submit to him? And if a husband desires her to do so, he will know that it is only by loving her that he will succeed.

c. The husband is to love like Christ

Does the requirement of 'submission' sound hard to a wife? I think what is required of her husband is harder. This is not that he 'love' her with the romantic, sentimental and even aggressive passion which frequently passes for genuine love today; instead, he is to love her with the love of Christ. If the husband's obligation to love is repeated three times, so is the requirement to model his attitude and behaviour on Christ's. He is the head of his wife *as Christ is the head of the church* (verse 23); he is to love his wife *as Christ loved the church* (verse 25); and he is to nourish and cherish her *as Christ does the church* (verse 29). Thus his headship, his love and his care are all to resemble Christ's. The highest pinnacle of demand is reached in verse 25 where he is exhorted to love his wife *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. This is the totality of self-sacrifice. He is to love her with what is sometimes termed 'Calvary love'; no higher standard is conceivable. A Christian husband who even partially fulfils this ideal preaches the gospel without ever opening his lips, for people can see in him that quality of love which took Jesus Christ to his cross.

d. The husband's love, like Christ's, sacrifices in order to serve

We considered earlier the five verbs of verses 25 and 26. Christ loved' the church and 'gave himself' for her, in order to 'cleanse' her, 'sanctify' her, and ultimately 'present' her to himself in full splendour and without any defect. In other words, his love and self-sacrifice were not an idle display, but purposive. And his purpose was not to impose an alien identity upon the church, but to free her from the spots and wrinkles which mar her beauty and to display her in her true glory. The Christian husband is to have a similar concern. His headship will never be used to suppress his wife. He longs to see her liberated from everything which spoils her true feminine identity and growing towards that 'glory', that perfection of fulfilled personhood which will be the final destiny of all those whom Christ redeems. To this end Christ gave himself. To this end too the husband gives himself in love.

e. The wife's submission is but another aspect of love

We have seen that the essence of Paul's instruction is 'Wives submit, husbands love', and that these words are different from one another since they recognize the headship which God has

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given to the husband. Yet when we try to define the two verbs, it is not easy to distinguish clearly between them. What does it mean to 'submit'? It is to give oneself up to somebody. What does it mean to 'love'? It is to give oneself up for somebody, as Christ 'gave himself up' for the church. Thus 'submission' and 'love' are two aspects of the very same thing, namely of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage.

Not that such self-giving is ever easy. I fear I may have painted a picture of married life which is more romantic than realistic. The truth is that all self-sacrifice, although the way of service and the means to self-realisation, is also painful. Indeed, love and pain appear to be inseparable, especially in sinners like us, since our fallenness has not been obliterated by our re-creation through Christ. In marriage there is the pain of adjustment, as the old independent 'I' gives way to the new interdependent 'we'. There is also the pain of vulnerability as closeness to one another leads to self-exposure, self-exposure to mutual knowledge, and knowledge to the risk of rejection. So husbands and wives should not expect to discover harmony without conflict; they have to work at building a relationship of love, respect and truth.

The giving of oneself to anybody is a recognition of the worth of the other self. For if I give myself up, it can only be because I value the other person so highly that I want to sacrifice myself for his or her self, in order that he may develop his selfhood, or she hers, more fully. Now to lose oneself that the other may find his or her self—that is the essence of the gospel of Christ. It is also the essence of the marriage relationship, for as the husband loves his wife and the wife submits to her husband, each is seeking to enable the other to become more fully himself and herself, within the harmonious complementarity of the sexes.

11. Parents, children, masters and servants

6:1–9

Paul now passes in his *Haustafeln* from the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives to those of parents and children. As he does so, it is immediately noteworthy that he thinks of the local congregation as a 'church family', consisting of both sexes and of all ages. Since he addresses the children in this paragraph as well as their parents, he evidently expects whole families to come together for public worship not only to praise God but also to listen to his Word. They would hear the Old Testament Scriptures and the apostle's letters read aloud and expounded, and when the apostolic *Haustafeln* were read out, they would learn their own Christian duties and those of other members of their family. That children should have been included in the instructions, and given a section of their own, is an indication of the already pervasive influence in the church of him who had said, 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God,' and again, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.' It was a radical change from the callous cruelty which prevailed in the Roman Empire, in which unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed ones killed, and even healthy children were regarded by many as a partial nuisance because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce.

1. The duty of children (verses 1–3)

Children, obey your parents ... Here is another example of that general submissiveness which according to 5:21 is expected of all members of God's new society. But this time the requirement is stronger, namely obedience. For wives were not told to 'obey', and in my view the 1662 Prayer Book marriage service was wrong to include this verb in the bride's vows. The concept of a

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husband who issues commands and of a wife who gives him obedience is simply not found in the New Testament. The nearest approximation to it is the cited example of Sarah who 'obeyed Abraham, calling him lord'. But even in that passage the apostle Peter's actual instruction to wives is the same as Paul's, namely, 'Be submissive to your husbands.' And, as we saw in the last chapter, a wife's submission is something quite different from obedience. It is a voluntary self-giving to a lover whose responsibility is defined in terms of constructive care; it is love's response to love.

Children, however, are to obey their parents. Although Paul goes on to restrict parental authority and to guide it into the channel of Christian education, it is still clear that parents' authority over their children is distinct from and stronger than the husband's 'headship' over his wife. Yet Paul does not take it for granted. His teaching is always rationally argued. As with the wife's submission, so with the child's obedience, he builds his instruction on a carefully laid foundation. He gives three grounds for the obedience of children in a Christian home: nature, the law and the gospel.

First, nature: *Children, obey your parents ..., for this is right, or righteous (dikaios)*. Child obedience belongs to that realm which came in medieval theology to be called 'natural justice'. It does not depend on special revelation; it is part of the natural law which God has written on all human hearts. It is not confined to Christian ethics; it is standard behaviour in every society. Pagan moralists, both Greek and Roman, taught it. Stoic philosophers saw a son's obedience as self-evident, plainly required by reason and part of 'the nature of things'. Much earlier, and in oriental culture, one of the greatest emphases of Confucius was on filial respect, so that still today, though centuries later, Chinese, Korean and Japanese customs continue to reflect his influence. Indeed, virtually all civilizations have regarded the recognition of parental authority as indispensable to a stable society. We experience no sense of surprise, therefore, when Paul includes 'disobedient to parents' as a mark both of a decadent society which God has given up to its own godlessness and of 'the last days' which began with the coming of Christ.⁵

If the obedience of children is part of the natural law which God has written on human hearts, it belongs also to the revealed law which God gave on stone tablets to Moses. So Paul goes on: *Honour your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth (verses 2, 3)*. In his quotation Paul conflates the Greek text of Exodus 20:12 ('Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long ...') and Deuteronomy 5:16 ('that it may go well with you'). Since this is the fifth of the ten commandments and appears at first sight to concern our duty to our neighbour, many Christians have divided the decalogue into two uneven halves, the first four commandments specifying our duty to God and the remaining six our duty to our neighbour. But the Jews regularly taught that each of the law's two tablets contains five commandments. The significance of this arrangement is that it brings the honouring of our parents into our duty to God. And this is surely right. For at least during our childhood they represent God to us and mediate to us both his authority and his love. We are to 'honour' them, that is, acknowledge their God-given authority, and so give them not only our obedience, but our love and respect as well. It is because parental authority is divinely delegated authority that respectful obedience to parents was invested with such great importance in the life of God's covenant people. Moses was commanded to say to Israel: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother

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and his father ... I am the Lord your God.’ Reverence for parents was thus made an integral part of reverence for God as their God and of their special relationship to him as his people. Hence the extremely severe penalty (death, in fact) which was to be inflicted on anyone who cursed his parents and on the ‘stubborn and rebellious son’ who refused to obey them, defied their warning discipline and proved to be incorrigible.⁷

The apostle Paul, however, prefers to enforce God’s commandment with a promise than with a threat. He reminds his readers that the command to honour parents is *the first commandment with a promise*, and he goes on to quote the promise of prosperity and long life. This deceptively simple statement contains several problems. Some commentators beg to disagree with Paul, claiming that the fifth commandment is not, in fact, the first to have a promise attached to it, since the second commandment also has one, promising ‘steadfast love to thousands’ who love and obey God. A sufficient answer to this objection is that these last words ‘are a declaration of God’s character rather than a promise’. Others express the opinion that in this case it is not the first but the only commandment with a promise, for no other commandment has one. To this F. F. Bruce aptly responds that Paul is thinking ‘not only of the decalogue but of the whole body of Pentateuchal legislation which is introduced by the decalogue’.⁹ This does not satisfy everybody, however. So some interpret ‘first’ as a reference to rank not order (as when the scribe asked ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’), and suggest that it means ‘a commandment of foremost significance, with a promise attached’ or ‘the first in importance among those relating to our social duties’³ or that ‘this, for children, is a primary commandment, accompanied with a promise’.

The promise concerned was material prosperity (*that it may be well with you*) and long life (*that you may live long*). During the time of the theocracy, when Israel was both a nation and a church over which God ruled, his covenant blessings were closely tied to the promised land, and to safety, health and good harvests in it. But now times have changed, and God’s dealings with his people have also changed. This seems to be implied by Paul’s deliberate alteration of the promise from the original ‘in the land which the Lord your God gives you’ to *on the earth*. The promised land fades from view. God’s covenant people are now an international community, and his blessings are largely spiritual in Christ. At the same time, alongside his blessing ‘in the heavenly places’ (1:3), there is here a promised blessing ‘on earth’. Probably we should interpret this in general rather than individual terms. Then what is promised is not so much long life to each child who obeys his parents, as social stability to any community in which children honour their parents. Certainly a healthy society is inconceivable without a strong family life.

Two practical questions arise from the requirement that children obey their parents. Is the command unconditional? And to whom is it addressed?

Many Christian young people, who are anxious to conform their lives to the teaching of Scripture, are perplexed by the requirement of obedience. Are they to obey absolutely everything their parents tell them to do? What if they have themselves come to know Christ, while so far as they know their parents remain unconverted? If their parents forbid them to follow Christ or to join the Christian community, are they obliged to obey? In reply to such questions, which are often asked in great pain and anxiety, I think I need first to say that during a young person’s minority (and I have more to say about this later) obedience to parents should be the norm, and disobedience the rare exception.

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For example, supposing you are a young person who, having been brought up in a non-Christian home, have recently come to Christ and now desire to be baptized, but your parents are forbidding it. Personally, I would not advise you to go ahead in defiance of your parents' expressed wishes. Even baptism, though Jesus commanded it, can wait until you are older and the law of your country gives you a measure of independence. If, on the other hand, your parents were to forbid you to worship and follow Christ in your heart, this you could not obey. It must have been just such a situation as this that Jesus had in mind when he warned of family conflict in which parents and children would be opposed to one another and our enemies would belong to our own household. In such circumstances, however painful or perilous, our loyalty to Christ must come first. If we love even our parents more than him, he said, we are not worthy of him. Not, of course, that we should ever seek family conflict or be guilty of fomenting it. On the contrary, all the followers of Jesus are called to be peacemakers and, so far as it depends on us, to live peaceably with everybody.⁶ Yet sometimes tension and strife simply cannot be avoided.

It is quite true that in the parallel passage in Colossians children are told to obey parents 'in everything'. But this is balanced in Ephesians by the command to obey them *in the Lord* (6:1). The latter instruction surely modifies the former. Children are not to obey their parents in absolutely everything without exception, but in everything which is compatible with their primary loyalty, namely to their Lord Jesus Christ.

This brings us to the second practical question: who are these 'children' who are to obey their parents? And when do they cease to be such? Is Paul addressing himself only to infants, and to young boys and girls? Or does he include all young people who are still unmarried and living at home, even though now they may be grown up and may long since have left their childhood and their teens behind? No single answer can be given to this question; for different answers would need to be given in different cultures. In most western countries the age at which young people attain their majority has in recent years been lowered from twenty-one to eighteen. At that age now they are no longer minors, they are given the vote, and they are free to marry without parental consent. At the opposite extreme, in the empire of Paul's day, 'the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age.' In some third world countries today, especially in Asia, a similar custom prevails. All one can say in relation to such situations is that either law or custom in every society recognizes at least a measure of independence for young people, either when manhood or womanhood is reached, or when they attain a certain age, or when they leave home or marry. Christians should not defy the accepted convention of their own culture in this matter. So long as they are regarded in their culture as children or minors, they should continue to obey their parents.

One other important point. Even after we have attained our majority, are regarded in our culture as being no longer under the authority of our parents, and are therefore no longer under obligation to 'obey' them, we still must continue to 'honour' them. Our parents occupy a unique position in our lives. If we honour them as we should, we will never neglect or forget them. Many third world cultures, even non-Christian ones, care for elderly parents far more conscientiously and thoughtfully than most of us do, who live in the so-called Christian West. Although in some circumstances it may be unavoidable and in others even desirable, it is a sad reflection on the selfish western tradition of the nuclear family that instead of looking after our elderly relatives

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ourselves, we consign them to an old people's home. Thus to isolate, and even symbolically to reject, one's own parents can seldom be reconciled with the command to honour them.

So far we have been following Paul as he grounds the child's obedience to his parents on both nature and Scripture, on natural law and revealed law. That is, he urges it first because it is right and secondly because it is written. His third argument introduces the gospel and the new day which dawned with Jesus Christ. This is implied in the injunction that children should obey their parents *in the Lord*, namely, in the Lord Jesus. Already we have seen that these words modify the parallel command in Colossians to obey parents 'in everything'. But this does not exhaust their meaning. They bring child-obedience into the realm of specifically Christian duty, and lay upon children the responsibility to obey their parents because of their own personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is he who as Creator first established order in family and society, and in the new society which he is now building he does not overthrow it. There is an essential continuity between the old order and the new, between the original creation and the new creation in Christ. Families have not been abolished. Men and women still marry and have children. 'In the Lord' there are still husbands and wives, parents and children. What has changed relates to the ravages of the fall. For the family life which God created at the beginning and pronounced to be 'good' was spoiled by human rebellion and selfishness. Relationships fell apart. Society was fractured. Love was twisted into lust, and authority into oppression. But now *in the Lord*, by his reconciling work, God's new society has begun, continuous with the old in the fact of family life but discontinuous in its quality. For now all our relationships are transformed precisely because they are *in the Lord*. They are purged of ruinous self-centredness, and suffused instead with Christ's love and peace. Even obedience to parents is changed. It is no longer a grudging acquiescence in parental authority. Christian children learn to obey with gladness, 'for this pleases the Lord'. They remember the loving submission which Jesus himself gave as a boy to his parents.¹ Now this same Jesus is their Lord and Saviour, and the creator of the new order, so they are anxious to do what pleases him.

2. The duty of parents (verse 4)

The instruction to children to obey their parents presupposes, as we have seen, the fact of parental authority. Yet when Paul outlines how parents should behave towards their children, it is not the exercise, but the restraint, of their authority which he urges upon them.

The picture he paints of fathers as self-controlled, gentle, patient educators of their children is in stark contrast to the norm of his own day. 'At the head of the Roman family ... was the *pater familias*, who exercised a sovereign authority over all members of the family ... The autocratic character of the *patria potestas* manifested itself not only in the father's right to punish, but also in his *iuo vitae necisque* (killing the newborn; exposure of children) ... *The pater familias* has a full right of disposal over his children, as over slaves and things ...' William Barclay adds: 'A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.'⁴

Completely different was the Christian father, especially if he remembered what Paul had written earlier, namely that his fatherhood was derived from the 'one God and Father of us all' (3:14–15; 4:6). The overarching theme of *Ephesians* is that through Christ's reconciling work there is now one multinational, multicultural family of God. So human fathers are to care for their

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families as God the Father cares for his. And incidentally mothers are surely included too. Although the word in verse 4 is, in fact, 'fathers' (*pateres*), yet it could be used for 'fathers and mothers', much as 'brothers' (*adelphoi*) meant 'brothers and sisters'. Certainly it is parents, both father and mother, who are referred to in verses 1–3, so that it is entirely legitimate for GNB to put 'parents' in verse 4.

Negatively, they are told: *Do not provoke your children to anger* (verse 4), or 'do not exasperate your children' (NIV) or 'goad your children to resentment' (NEB). Paul recognizes how delicate a child's personality is. Some authors have speculated that in his own childhood he was comparatively deprived of love, and that in this instruction to parents there is a flashback to some early childhood reminiscence. We do not know. What we do know is that parents can easily misuse their authority either by making irritating or unreasonable demands which make no allowances for the inexperience and immaturity of children, or by harshness and cruelty at one extreme or by favouritism and over-indulgence at the other, or by humiliating or suppressing them, or by those two vindictive weapons sarcasm and ridicule. These are some of the parental attitudes which provoke resentment and anger in children. How many 'angry young men', hostile to society at large, have learned their hostility as children in an unsympathetic home? There is a place for discipline, as Paul goes on to say, but it must never be arbitrary (for children have a built-in sense of justice) or unkind. Otherwise, they will 'become discouraged'. Conversely, almost nothing causes a child's personality to blossom and gifts to develop like the positive encouragement of loving, understanding parents. Indeed, just as a husband's love for his wife is expressed in helping her develop her full potential, so parents' love for their children is expressed in helping them develop theirs.

Behind this curbing of parental authority there lies the clear recognition that, although children are to obey their parents in the Lord, yet they have a life and personality of their own. They are little people in their own right. As such they are to be respected, and on no account to be exploited, manipulated or crushed. 'The dominant father of the Victorian novels', writes Sir Frederick Catherwood, 'who used his own authority for his own ends is no more entitled to claim Christian authority than the rebellious son. One is abusing authority, the other is flouting it. Both are wrong.'

It is not only in the novels of Victorian England that oppressive parenthood is to be seen, however. Another example comes from more recent times in the United States. Edna Ferber's novel *Giant* tells the story of the Texan, Jordan Benedict. Owner of a two and a half million acre cattle ranch, he is furious because his infant son Jordy, aged three, does not take to horses. When set on one in full cowboy regalia, he cries to be taken down. His father is disgusted. 'I rode before I could walk', he says. 'All right', responds his wife Leslie, 'that was very cute, but that was you. This is another person. Maybe he doesn't like horses ...' 'He's a Benedict,' his father retorts, 'and I'm going to make a horseman out of him if I have to *tie* him to do it'. 'You've been playing God so long you think you run the world'. 'I run the part of it that's mine'. 'He's not yours. He's yours and mine. And not even ours. He's himself ...'

Every child must be allowed to be himself. Wise parents recognize that not all the non-conforming responses of childhood deserve to be styled 'rebellion'. On the contrary, it is by experiment that children discover both the limits of their liberty and the quality of their parents'

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love. Moreover, in order to grow up, they have to develop their independence, not because they are resistant to their parents' authority but because they need to exercise their own.

Paul does not rest content with his negative instruction to parents not to provoke their children to anger. He complements it with this positive exhortation: *Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. The verb (*ektrephō*) means literally to 'nourish' or 'feed' and was used in 5:29 of the nourishment we give to our own bodies. But it is also used of the upbringing of children. Calvin's translation is, 'Let them be fondly cherished ..., deal gently with them,' and William Hendriksen's, 'Rear them tenderly.'⁹ Here is an understanding, centuries before modern psychology emphasized the vital importance of the earliest years of life, that children are fragile creatures needing the tenderness and security of love.

The implications of this insistence on the parental upbringing of children are many. One is that Christian parents should jealously guard their responsibility, delegating some of it indeed to both church and school, but never entirely surrendering it. It is their own God-given task; nobody can adequately or completely replace them. Another implication is that parents need to take time and trouble with their children. Failure to do so causes many problems later. As Dr Lloyd-Jones pertinently observes, 'If parents but gave as much thought to the rearing of their children as they do to the rearing of animals and flowers, the situation would be very different.'

How then should parents rear their children? Answer: *in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*. The second word (*nouthesia*), whether translated 'instruction' or 'warning', seems to refer primarily to verbal education, while the first word (*paideia*) means training by discipline, even by punishment. '*Paideia (discipline)* is training with the accent on the correction of the young.' It is the word used in Hebrews 12 both of earthly fathers and also of our heavenly Father who 'disciplines us for our good'.

On the need for discipline and punishment the Old Testament was clear. 'He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.' Again, 'Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.' Of course our Victorian ancestors used these verses from Proverbs to justify their excessively stern discipline. In our generation, on the other hand, we have witnessed an over-reaction leading to excessively *laissez-faire* permissiveness. To the one extreme we need to say: 'The opposite of wrong discipline is not the absence of discipline, but right discipline, true discipline.' To the other extreme we need to say: 'The opposite of no discipline at all is not cruelty, it is balanced discipline, it is controlled discipline.'⁶ Above all, parents must be clear about their motives. It is always dangerous for them to discipline their children when they are annoyed, when their pride has been injured, or when they have lost their temper. Let me quote Dr Lloyd-Jones again, for his exposition of these verses is full of practical wisdom: 'When you are disciplining a child, you should have first controlled yourself ... What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline when you obviously need it yourself? Self-control, the control of temper, is an essential prerequisite in the control of others.'

So far we have been thinking principally of the disciplining of children. But the Christian upbringing of children is mental as well as moral. It includes instruction too. One popular contemporary fashion is to urge parents to be totally 'non-directive' and to leave their children to find their own way. Paul is of a different mind. Certainly some parents are too directive, too domineering, and thereby inhibit their children from learning to make their own decisions and

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so grow into maturity. We have to distinguish between true and false education. False education is indoctrination, in which parents and teachers impose their mind and will on the child. True education, on the other hand, is stimulation, in which parents and teachers act as a catalyst, and encourage the child to make his own responses. This they cannot do if they leave the child to flounder; they have to teach Christian values of truth and goodness, defend them, and recommend their acceptance, but at the same time abstain from any pressure, still more coercion.

The discipline and instruction in which parents are to bring up their children, Paul writes, are 'the Lord's'. This has been taken by some to mean simply that the kind of instruction and discipline intended 'belong to a Christian upbringing' (NEB), and that Paul is specifying Christian as opposed to secular education. But I think it means more than this, namely that behind the parents who teach and discipline their children there stands the Lord himself. It is he who is the chief teacher and administrator of discipline. Certainly the overriding concern of Christian parents is not just that their children will submit to their authority, but that through this they will come to know and obey the Lord. There is always much rejoicing and thanksgiving whenever the teaching and discipline of a Christian home leads, not artificially but naturally, to a child's acceptance of the teaching and discipline of the Lord Jesus himself.

3. The duty of slaves (verses 5–8)

Slavery seems to have been universal in the ancient world. A high percentage of the population were slaves. 'It has been computed that in the Roman Empire there were 60,000,000 slaves.' They constituted the work force, and included not only domestic servants and manual labourers but educated people as well, like doctors, teachers and administrators. Slaves could be inherited or purchased, or acquired in settlement of a bad debt, and prisoners of war commonly became slaves. Nobody queried or challenged the arrangement. 'The institution of slavery was a fact of Mediterranean economic life so completely accepted as a part of the labour structure of the time that one cannot correctly speak of the slave "problem" in antiquity. This unquestioning acceptance of the slave system explains why Plato in his plan of the good life as depicted in *The Republic* did not need to mention the slave class. It was simply there.'

To those of us who live in countries in which slavery has been abolished by law for one and a half centuries, it is hard to conceive how the ownership of one human being by another can have been countenanced in this way. It is even harder to understand how slaves can have been regarded more as things than as persons. For all his intellect and culture Aristotle could not contemplate any friendship between slave and slave-owner, for, he said 'A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave', although he could at least concede that 'a slave is a kind of possession with a soul'.

This dehumanization of slaves in the public mind was mirrored in early Roman legislation. 'Legally they were only chattels without rights, whom their master could treat virtually as he pleased.' 'The Roman state left the problem of the discipline of slaves to their owners ... The *pater familias* had complete control over all slaves owned in his *familia*, the power of punishment by whipping and by confinement in the *ergastulum*, and the right of execution of the death penalty.' Consequently, accounts of terrible atrocities have survived, especially from the pre-Christian era. Slaves were sometimes whipped, mutilated and imprisoned in chains, their teeth were knocked out, their eyes gouged out, they were even thrown to the wild beasts or crucified, and all this

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sometimes for the most trivial offences. The fact that some slaves ran away (risking, if caught, branding, flogging and even summary execution), while others committed suicide, is sufficient evidence that cruelty towards them was widespread.

At the same time, it would be a grave mistake to suppose that this kind of barbaric treatment was either habitual or universal, or that it continued unabated into the first century AD. Although the law at first prescribed no penalties for slave owners who illtreated their slaves, yet more often than not they were restrained by other factors, either by their own sense of responsibility, or by public opinion, or by self-interest. As for public opinion, Paul's Stoic contemporary Seneca was teaching the brotherhood of man and urging kindness to slaves. As for self-interest, masters knew that their slaves represented a high capital investment. It was, therefore, to their own advantage to take good care of their slaves, just as they did their farm animals and their furniture.

It is immediately remarkable that in his *Haustafeln* Paul should address himself to slaves at all. The simple fact that he does so indicates that they were accepted members of the Christian community and that he regards them as responsible people to whom, as much as to their masters, he sends a moral appeal. If children are to obey their parents, slaves are to obey their *earthly masters* (verse 5), and for the very same reason, namely that behind them they must learn to discern the figure of their *master ... in heaven* (verse 9), namely the Lord Christ. In each of the four verses addressed to slaves Jesus Christ is mentioned. They are to be obedient *as to Christ* (verse 5), to behave *as servants* (literally, 'slaves') *of Christ* (verse 6), to render service *as to the Lord* rather than men (verse 7), knowing that they will receive good *from the Lord* (verse 8). The Christ-centredness of this instruction is very striking. The slave's perspective has changed. His horizons have broadened. He has been liberated from the slavery of 'men-pleasing' into the freedom of serving Christ. His mundane tasks have been absorbed into a higher preoccupation, namely *the will of God* (verse 6) and the good pleasure of Christ.

Exactly the same principle can be applied by contemporary Christians to their work and employment. Our great need is the clear-sightedness to see Jesus Christ and to set him before us. It is possible for the housewife to cook a meal as if Jesus Christ were going to eat it, or to spring-clean the house as if Jesus Christ were to be the honoured guest. It is possible for teachers to educate children, for doctors to treat patients and nurses to care for them, for solicitors to help clients, shop assistants to serve customers, accountants to audit books and secretaries to type letters as if in each case they were serving Jesus Christ. Can the same be said in relation to the masses of industrial workers with tedious routine machine-minding to do, and to miners who have to work underground? Surely yes. The presence of Christ in the mine or factory is certainly no excuse for bad conditions. On the contrary, it should be a spur to improving them. At the same time, their situation is not nearly as bad as slavery in the Roman Empire, so that if the work of Christian slaves could be transformed by doing it *as to the Lord*, the same must be true of Christian miners, factory workers, dustmen, road sweepers and public lavatory attendants.

Once Christian slaves were clear in their minds that their primary responsibility was to serve the Lord Christ, their service to their earthly masters would become exemplary. First, they would be respectful, obeying them *with fear and trembling* (verse 5), which implies not a cringing servility before a human master but rather a reverent acknowledgement of the Lord Jesus whose authority the master represents. This is plain not only from the usual contexts of the expression 'fear and trembling' but also from the fact that in the equivalent Colossians passage it is replaced

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by 'fearing the Lord'. Next, they would obey *in singleness of heart* (5), with integrity or wholeheartedness, without hypocrisy or ulterior motives. Thirdly, they would be conscientious, not offering *eye-service as men-pleasers*, working only when the boss is watching in order to curry favour with him, but *as servants of Christ*, who is in any case watching all the time and is never deceived by shoddy work. Fourthly, their service would become willing and 'cheerful' (NEB) instead of reluctant or grudging. Because they would consciously be *doing the will of God*, they would do it *from the heart* (verse 6) and *with a good will* (verse 7). As we might say, their heart and soul would be in it. And all this because they know that their Lord is also their judge, and that no good work, whoever does it (*slave or free*), is ever left unrewarded by him (verse 8).

4. The duty of masters (verse 9)

Although the duties of Christian slaves are spelled out in some detail, Christian slave-owners are given only three principles, all of which however have far-reaching implications against the background of the middle of the first century AD. First, *do the same to them*. That is, if you hope to receive respect, show it; if you hope to receive service, give it. It is an application of the golden rule. However masters hope their slaves will behave towards them, they must behave towards their slaves in the same way. Paul admits no privileged superiority in the masters, as if they could themselves dispense with the very courtesies they expect to be shown.

Secondly, *forbear threatening*. As parents are not to provoke their children, so masters are not to threaten their slaves. That is, they are not to misuse their position of authority by issuing threats of punishment. Punishment was accepted in the Empire as the only way to keep slaves under control, and Christianity does not deny that in some circumstances punishment is legitimate, even necessary. But threats are a weapon which the powerful wield over the powerless. And a relationship based on threats is not a human relationship at all. So Paul forbade it.

Thirdly, the reason for these requirements is their *knowing that* Jesus Christ is *master* of both slave and slave-owner, *and that there is no partiality with him*. Slave-owners were used to being flattered and fawned upon, but they should not expect (for they will not receive) such discriminatory favouritism from the Lord Christ. Thus all three principles were designed to lessen the cultural and social gap between slave and slave-owner. Instead of regarding his relationship with his slaves as that of proprietor to chattels, or of superior to inferiors, he was to develop a relationship in which he gave them *the same* treatment as he hoped to receive, renounced the unfair weapon of threats, and recalled that he and they both shared the same heavenly master and impartial judge.

5. The abolition of slavery

The new relationship which Jesus Christ made possible between slave and slave-owner was something new and beautiful. Understandably, however, it has seemed to many critics an inadequate Christian response to an unmitigated evil. Did the gospel offer no more radical solution to slavery than an adjustment of personal relationships? Even if Paul held back from inciting slaves to rise up against their owners and seize their freedom (as some hotheads wish he had), why did he not at least command slave-owners to emancipate their slaves? Why are the New Testament writers so feeble and mealy-mouthed, instead of condemning slavery outright for the horribly inhuman thing it was?

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In whatever way we Christians seek to defend ourselves and our faith against such criticisms, it must never be by condoning slavery. For if the New Testament does not explicitly condemn slavery, it does not condone it either. Although there have been varying degrees of degradation in slavery at different times and places, and although Afro-American slavery was worse than Roman, Roman than Greek and Greek than Hebrew, yet the Christian conscience must condemn slavery in every form. Its evil lies neither in the servitude it involves (for Jesus voluntarily made himself a slave of others, and so did his apostle Paul),⁶ nor even in the element of compulsion, but rather in the ownership by one human being of others which degrades them into subhuman goods to be used, exploited and traded, and in the cruelty which often accompanied this. This being so, we again ask why the New Testament did not call for its abolition.

The first answer is the pragmatic one, namely that Christians were at first an insignificant group in the Empire. Their religion was itself still unlawful, and they were politically powerless. Besides, slavery was at that time an indispensable part of the fabric of Roman society. In most cities there were many times more slaves than free people. It would therefore have been impossible to abolish slavery at a single stroke without the complete disintegration of society. Even if Christians had liberated their slaves, they would have condemned most of them to unemployment and penury. As G. B. Caird has put it, 'Ancient society was economically as dependent on slavery as modern society is on machinery, and anyone proposing its abolition could only be regarded as a seditious fanatic.' It had to be tolerated a while longer (although, to be sure, that 'while longer' lasted much, much too long) as a symptom of what Christians called 'this present evil age'.

There is a second reason why we do not find in the New Testament stronger expressions of indignation at the system. 'The lack in antiquity of any deep abhorrence of slavery as a social and economic evil may be explained in part', writes W. L. Westermann, by this fact that 'the change of legal status out of slavery into liberty by way of manumission was ... constant and easy ...' 'The apostles' attitude is best explained by the unique way in which the Romans of the first century AD treated their slaves, and released them in great numbers.' According to the results of Tenney Frank's research, between 81 and 49 BC 500,000 Roman slaves were freed. So 'The Roman slave, far from living in perpetual servitude, could look forward to a day of opportunity. It became the common practice of the Romans to free their slaves and then establish them in a trade or profession. Many times the former slave became wealthier than his patron.' This evidence helps to explain both Paul's advice to Corinthian slaves, if they could gain their freedom, to seize the opportunity to do so, and his strong hint to Philemon that he should release Onesimus.²

A third point in alleviation of the New Testament's position is that by that time the legal status of slaves was beginning to be eased and showed signs of further improvement to come. 'Sweeping humanitarian changes had been introduced into the Roman world by the first century AD, which led to radically improved treatment of slaves.' Steadily they were granted many of the legal rights enjoyed by free people, including the right to marry and have a family, and the right to own property. 'In AD 20 a decree of the Senate specified that slave criminals were to be tried in the same way as free men.' Several emperors introduced liberalizing measures. 'Claudius c. AD 50 enacted that sick slaves who were deserted by their masters should be free if they recovered. Under Vespasian c. 75 a female slave could under certain circumstances obtain her freedom if prostituted by her master. Domitian c. 90 forbade the mutilation of slaves. Hadrian early in the

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second century refused to countenance the sale of slaves for immoral or gladiatorial purposes, and may have forbidden the execution of slaves by their masters.'

So more humane legislation was already being introduced in the Empire at the time when the gospel arrived to accelerate and extend the process. Nevertheless we Christians cannot escape a sense of shame that slavery and the slave trade were tolerated for so long, especially later in the European colonies. Both should have been abolished centuries before they were. And the best Christian minds recognized this. Calvin, for example, in the middle of the sixteenth century attributed slavery to original sin. He deduced it to be 'a thing totally against all the order of nature' that human beings 'fashioned after the image of God' should ever be 'put to such reproach'.

While we cannot defend the indolence or cowardice of two further Christian centuries which saw this social evil but failed to eradicate it, we can at the same time rejoice that the gospel immediately began even in the first century to undermine the institution; it lit a fuse which at long last led to the explosion which destroyed it. This brings us back to Paul's Ephesian letter and to the transformed slave-master relationship which he described. Three aspects of it may be mentioned.

The first is equality. Of course nobody could imagine that in culture or in law, masters and slaves were equal. Quite patently they were not, since the one owned the other. Nevertheless, they were equal before God, because they had the same Lord and judge, who showed no partiality between them (verse 9). Roman law was still in certain respects discriminatory; heavenly justice was not. Paul reminded both slaves and masters of this fact. For this was the theological foundation on which he built his doctrine of equality. Slaves were to give their earthly masters good service with a good will, as if to their heavenly Master, *knowing that* he would honour and reward them. Masters were not to threaten but to respect their slaves, *knowing that* they had the same Master in heaven. Thus, it was their shared knowledge of the lordship and the judgment of Jesus Christ which made them equal. If they remembered that Jesus was their common Lord now and would one day be their common judge, their whole attitude to one another would change.

The second quality of their relationship was to be justice. What is implicit here in the general instruction to masters to *do the same to them* (verse 9) is made explicit in Colossians 4:1: 'Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.' This injunction will have sounded extremely strange in the ears of those who first heard it. For although, as we have seen, Roman law was becoming gradually more humane, slaves were still popularly regarded as the property of their masters, who had absolute power over them. And of course where there are thought to be no rights, there can be no justice. So justice for slaves was a revolutionary new concept. Essentially it was the gospel which insisted that slaves had rights. This is made plain by the reciprocal nature of the slave-master relationship. For if slaves had duties to their masters, masters had duties to their slaves. Then the master's duties became the slave's rights, just as the slave's duties were the master's rights.

In labour relations today the same basic principle holds good of justice based on reciprocal rights. Employers and employees alike have duties—the employee to give good work and the employer to pay a just wage. Then each person's duty becomes the other person's right. If it is the employee's duty to give good work, it is the employer's right to expect it. If it is the employer's

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duty to pay a fair wage, it is the employee's right to expect it. The major human problem in management-labour disputes is that each side concentrates on securing its own rights, and on inducing the other side to do its duty. Paul, however, reverses the emphasis. He urges each side to concentrate on its responsibilities, not on its rights. Certainly if in modern industrial disputes the concern were for each side to fulfil its own duty and secure the other side's rights, labour relations would immediately be sweetened.

The third and highest aspect of the transformed slave-master relationship is brotherhood. It appears with conspicuous clarity in Paul's letter to Philemon, in which he urges him to receive back his fugitive but now converted slave Onesimus, and to welcome him 'no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother'. The words would have sounded incredible to all but Christian ears. Seneca taught the universal brotherhood of mankind but I cannot find that he applied his doctrine to slaves. 'Comrades', he called them, and even 'friends', but not 'brothers'. The concept of the brotherhood was Paul's innovation and is one of the major themes of Ephesians. For God's new society is the Father's household or family, all of whose members are related to one another in Christ as brothers and sisters. Even in the first letter he wrote he could affirm with confidence that all who are in Christ are the sons and daughters of God, and that 'there is neither ... slave nor free, ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.⁸ He then repeated this sentiment in the letter which parallels Ephesians: 'Here there cannot be ... slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.' A message which thus united master and slave as brothers *ipso facto* issued its radical challenge to an institution which separated them as proprietor and property. Thereafter it was only a matter of time. 'Slavery would be abolished *from within*'.

12. Principalities and powers

6:10–20

We have had occasion several times in our study of this letter to marvel at the breadth of Paul's horizons. He began by unfolding God's purpose, conceived in a past eternity before the foundation of the world, to create a single new human race through the death and resurrection of Christ and ultimately to unite the whole church and the whole creation under Christ's headship. He has emphasized that a distinctive shape has been given to this divine plan by the inclusion in God's new society, on an entirely equal footing, of Jews and Gentiles. The old days of division and discrimination have gone. A brand new oneness has emerged, in which through union with Christ Jews and Gentiles are equal members of the same body and equal sharers in the same promise. So now the one Father has one family, the one Messiah-Saviour one people, and the one Spirit one body. These sure facts of what God has done through Christ and by the Spirit form the basis on which Paul went on to issue his eloquent appeal. His readers must live a life that is 'worthy' of their calling and 'fitting' to their status as God's new and reconciled society. They must demonstrate their unity in the Christian fellowship, while at the same time rejoicing in the diversity of their gifts and so of their ministries. They must put away all the uncleanness of their pre-conversion behaviour and live a life of 'true righteousness and holiness'. And they must learn to submit to one another in every kind of domestic relationship and so promote harmony in their homes. Unity, diversity, purity and harmony—these the apostle has stressed as major characteristics of the new life and the new society in Christ. It has seemed a beautiful ideal, an obviously desirable goal, and not so difficult to attain.

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But now Paul brings us down to earth, and to realities harsher than dreams. He reminds us of the opposition. Beneath surface appearances an unseen spiritual battle is raging. He introduces us to the devil (already mentioned in 2:2 and 4:27) and to certain 'principalities and powers' at his command. He supplies us with no biography of the devil, and no account of the origin of the forces of darkness. He assumes their existence as common ground between himself and his readers. In any case, his purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity, but to warn us of their hostility and teach us how to overcome them. Is God's plan to create a new society? Then they will do their utmost to destroy it. Has God through Jesus Christ broken down the walls dividing human beings of different races and cultures from each other? Then the devil through his emissaries will strive to rebuild them. Does God intend his reconciled and redeemed people to live together in harmony and purity? Then the powers of hell will scatter among them the seeds of discord and sin. It is with these powers that we are told to wage war, or—to be more precise—to 'wrestle' (verse 12, AV). This metaphor is not necessarily incompatible with that of the armed soldier which Paul goes on to develop, as if he 'changed the scenery from that of the battlefield to that of the gymnasium'.¹ He is simply wanting to emphasize the reality of our engagement with the powers of evil, and the grim necessity of hand-to-hand combat.

The abrupt transition from the 'peaceful homes and healthful days' of the previous paragraphs to the hideous malice of devilish plots in this section causes us a painful shock, but an essential one. We all wish we could spend our lives in undisturbed tranquillity, among our loved-ones at home and in the fellowship of God's people. But the way of the escapist has been effectively blocked. Christians have to face the prospect of conflict with God's enemy and theirs. We need to accept the implications of this concluding passage of Paul's letter. 'It is a stirring call to battle ... Do you not hear the bugle, and the trumpet?... We are being roused, we are being stimulated, we are being set upon our feet; we are told to be men. The whole tone is martial, it is manly, it is strong'. Moreover, there will be no cessation of hostilities, not even a temporary truce or cease-fire, until the end of life or of history when the peace of heaven is attained. It seems probable that Paul implies this by his *Finally* ... For the better manuscripts have an expression which should be translated not 'finally', introducing the conclusion, but 'henceforward' meaning 'for the remaining time'. If this is correct, then the apostle is indicating that the whole of the interim period between the Lord's two comings is to be characterized by conflict. The peace which God has made through Christ's cross is to be experienced only in the midst of a relentless struggle against evil. And for this the strength of the Lord and the armour of God are indispensable.

1. The enemy we face (verses 10–12)

A thorough knowledge of the enemy and a healthy respect for his prowess are a necessary preliminary to victory in war. Similarly, if we underestimate our spiritual enemy, we shall see no need for God's armour, we shall go out to the battle unarmed, with no weapons but our own puny strength, and we shall be quickly and ignominiously defeated.

So in between his summons to seek the Lord's strength and put on God's armour on the one hand (verses 10–11) and his itemizing of our weapons on the other (verses 13–20) Paul gives us a full and frightening description of the forces arrayed against us (verse 12). *For we are not contending against flesh and blood, he writes, but against the principalities, against the powers.* In other words, our struggle is not with human beings but with cosmic intelligences; our enemies

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are not human but demonic. Paul's Asian readers were quite familiar with this fact. They doubtless remembered—or would have heard about—the incident of the Jewish exorcists in Ephesus who were rash enough to try to dismiss an evil spirit in the name of Jesus without themselves knowing the Jesus whose name they used. Instead of succeeding in their attempt, they were overpowered by the demoniac and fled in panic, *naked and battered*. This kind of happening may have been common. For Paul's Ephesian converts had previously dabbled in the occult and then made a public bonfire of their valuable books of magic. Such a direct challenge to the forces of evil will not have gone unheeded.⁶

The forces arrayed against us have three main characteristics. First, they are powerful. Whether 'principalities' and 'powers' refer to different ranks of evil spirits in the hierarchy of hell we do not know, but both titles draw attention to the power and authority they wield. They are also called *the world rulers of this present darkness*. The word *kosmokratores* was used in astrology of the planets which were thought to control the fate of mankind, in the Orphic Hymns of Zeus, in rabbinical writings of Nebuchadnezzar and other pagan monarchs, and in various ancient inscriptions of the Roman emperor. All these usages exemplify the notion of a worldwide' rule. When applied to the powers of evil they are reminiscent of the devil's claim to be able to give Jesus 'all the kingdoms of the world', of the title 'the ruler of this world' which Jesus gave him, and of John's statement that 'the whole world is in the power of the evil one'. These texts do not deny our Lord's decisive conquest of the principalities and powers, but indicate that as usurpers they have not conceded defeat or been destroyed. So they continue to exercise considerable power.

Secondly, they are wicked. Power itself is neutral; it can be well used or misused. But our spiritual enemies use their power destructively rather than constructively, for evil not for good. They are the worldwide rulers of *this present darkness*. They hate the light, and shrink from it. Darkness is their natural habitat, the darkness of falsehood and sin. They are also described as *the spiritual hosts of wickedness*, which operate *in the heavenly places*, that is, in the sphere of invisible reality. They are 'spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil' (JBP). So then 'darkness' and 'wickedness' characterize their actions, and 'the appearance of Christ on earth was the signal for an unprecedented outburst of activity on the part of the realm of darkness controlled by these world-rulers'.⁸ If we hope to overcome them, we shall need to bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honour, no higher feelings. They recognize no Geneva Convention to restrict or partially civilize the weapons of their warfare. They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs.

Thirdly, they are cunning. Paul writes here of *the wiles of the devil* (verse 11), having declared in a previous letter 'we are not ignorant of his designs' or (NIV) 'schemes'.⁹ G. B. Caird finds the English word *wiles* 'slightly disparaging', as if Paul 'did not take the devil seriously', and 'hardly in keeping with the sustained military metaphor'. Instead, he suggests that ' "strategems" would give the required combination of tactical shrewdness and ingenious deception'. It is because the devil seldom attacks openly, preferring darkness to light, that when he transforms himself into 'an angel of light'² we are caught unsuspecting. He is a dangerous wolf, but enters Christ's flock in the disguise of a sheep. Sometimes he roars like a lion, but more often is as subtle as a serpent. We must not imagine, therefore, that open persecution and open temptation to sin are his only or even his commonest weapons; he prefers to seduce us into compromise and deceive us into

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error. Significantly this same word 'wiles' is used in 4:14 of false teachers and their crafty tricks. 'As in Bunyan's *Holy War*', writes E. K. Simpson, the devil develops 'a twofold infernal policy'. That is, 'the tactics of intimidation and insinuation alternate in Satan's plan of campaign. He plays both the bully and the beguiler. Force and fraud form his chief offensive against the camp of the saints, practised by turns.'

The 'wiles of the devil' take many forms, but he is at his wiliest when he succeeds in persuading people that he does not exist. To deny his reality is to expose ourselves the more to his subtlety. Dr Lloyd-Jones expresses his conviction on this matter in the following terms: 'I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his "fiery darts".'

In Paul's characterization of them, then, the powers of darkness are powerful, wicked and cunning. How can we expect to stand against the assaults of such enemies? It is impossible. We are far too weak and too ingenuous. Yet many—if not most—of our failures and defeats are due to our foolish self-confidence when we either disbelieve or forget how formidable our spiritual enemies are.

Only the power of God can defend and deliver us from the might, the evil and the craft of the devil. True, the principalities and powers are strong, but the power of God is stronger. It is his power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead and enthroned him in the heavenly places, and which has raised us from the death of sin and enthroned us with Christ. True, it is in those same heavenly places, in that same unseen world, that the principalities and powers are working (verse 12). But they were defeated at the cross and are now under Christ's feet and ours. So the invisible world in which they attack us and we defend ourselves is the very world in which Christ reigns over them and we reign with him. When Paul urges us to draw upon the power, might and strength of the Lord Jesus (verse 10), he uses exactly the same trio of words which he has used in 1:19 (*dynamis*, *kratos* and *ischus*) in relation to God's work of raising Jesus from the dead.

Two exhortations stand side by side. The first is general: *Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might* (verse 10). The second is more specific: *Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil* (verse 11). Both commands are conspicuous examples of the balanced teaching of Scripture. Some Christians are so self-confident that they think they can manage by themselves without the Lord's strength and armour. Others are so self-distrustful that they imagine they have nothing to contribute to their victory in spiritual warfare. Both are mistaken. Paul expresses the proper combination of divine enabling and human co-operation. The power is indeed the Lord's, and without *the strength of his might* we shall falter and fall, but still we need to *be strong* in him and in it, or more accurately to 'be strengthened'. For the verb is a passive present which could almost be rendered 'Strengthen yourselves in the Lord' or (NEB) 'Find your strength in the Lord'. It is the same construction as in 2 Timothy 2:1 where Paul exhorts Timothy to 'take strength from the grace of God which is ours in Christ Jesus' (NEB). Similarly, the armour is God's, and without it we shall be fatally unprotected and exposed, but still we need to take it up and put it on. Indeed we should do so piece by piece, as the apostle goes on to explain in verses 13 to 17.

2. The principalities and powers

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I have thus far assumed that by ‘principalities and powers’ Paul was alluding to personal, demonic intelligences. There is an increasingly fashionable theory among recent and contemporary theologians, however, that he was alluding rather to structures of thought (tradition, convention, law, authority, even religion), especially as embodied in the state and its institutions. Although a number of German theologians were debating this possibility in the 1930s, in the English-speaking world it has been a post-war discussion. So popular has it become that I think it is necessary first to trace its development and then to subject it to a critique.

In 1952 Gordon Rupp’s book *Principalities and Powers* appeared, sub-titled ‘Studies in the Christian conflict in history’. Writing in the aftermath of World War 2 he contrasted modern man’s ‘failure of nerve’ with the early Christians’ ‘exultant confidence’ and ‘stubborn truculence’ in the face of evil,⁷ and attributed the latter to their certainty about the victory of Jesus over the principalities and powers. By this expression, borrowed from late Jewish apocalyptic thought, Paul meant ‘supernatural cosmic forces, a vast hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings who inhabited the stars and ... were the arbiters of human destiny’, enslaving men ‘beneath a cosmic totalitarianism’. But Dr Rupp went on to apply the concept to ‘the little people’ who in every era have ‘felt themselves to be no more than the playthings of great historical forces’,⁹ now in the middle ages, now in the industrial revolution, and now in the twentieth century in which they feel the victims of ‘great economic and sociological pressures’. He concluded: ‘Down the centuries the principalities and powers have assumed many disguises. Terrifying and deadly they are, sometimes sprawling across the earth in some gigantic despotism, at times narrowed down to one single impulse in the mind of one individual man. But the fight is on. For believers fighting there is the certainty of struggle to the end. But there is also the assurance of victory.’ Dr Rupp writes rather as a historian than a theologian. Without any exegetical argument he simply transfers the expression ‘principalities and powers’ to economic, social and political forces.

The following year the Dutch original of Hendrik Berkhof’s monograph *Christ and the Powers* was published, following a lecture delivered in Germany in 1950. Its English translation by John Howard Yoder appeared in America in 1962. Professor Berkhof’s thesis is that, although Paul borrowed the vocabulary of the powers from Jewish apocalyptic, his understanding of them was different: ‘In comparison to the apocalypticists a certain “demythologizing” has taken place in Paul’s thought. In short, the apocalypses think primarily of the principalities and powers as heavenly angels; Paul sees them as structures of earthly existence.’⁴ He concedes that Paul *may* have ‘conceived of the Powers as personal beings’, yet ‘this aspect is so secondary that it makes little difference whether he did or not’. So he expresses his conclusion that ‘we must set aside the thought that Paul’s “Powers” are angels’.⁶ He identifies them with the *stoicheia tou kosmou* (‘elemental spirits of the universe’) of Galatians 4:3, 9, and Colossians 2:8 and 20, translates the expression ‘world powers’ and suggests that these are seen in human traditions and religious and ethical rules.

Dr Berkhof goes on to elaborate his understanding of Paul’s teaching on the Powers in relation to the creation, the fall, the redemption, and the role of the church. The Powers (tradition, morality, justice and order) were created by God, but have become tyrannical and objects of worship. So they both preserve and corrupt society. ‘The state, politics, class, social struggle, national interest, public opinion, accepted morality, the ideas of decency, humanity, democracy’—all these unify men, while separating them from the true God. Yet Christ has

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overcome them, for by his cross and resurrection they have been ‘unmasked as false gods’, and ‘the power of illusion’ has been struck from their hands.⁹ In consequence, Christians ‘see through the deception of the Powers’ and question their legitimacy, while others emboldened by the church refuse to let themselves be enslaved or intimidated. Thus the Powers are ‘christianized’ (*i.e.* limited to the modest, instrumental role God intended) or ‘neutralized’. More particularly, ‘the Holy Spirit “shrinks” the Powers before the eye of faith’,³ so that the discerning believer sees them in their true, creaturely proportions (whether nationalism, the state, money, convention or militarism) and avoids deifying the world. More positively, the church both announces to the Powers by the quality and unity of her life ‘that their unbroken dominion has come to an end’ and wages a defensive war against them in order ‘to hold ... their seduction and their enslavement at a distance’.⁵ This announcement is Dr Berkhof’s explanation of Ephesians 3:10 and the defensive war of 6:10–17.

A third presentation of this view of the Powers was given in 1954 by G. B. Caird in a series of lectures in Canada which were published in 1950 as *Principalities and Powers, A Study in Pauline Theology*. It is a more careful biblical study than either of the two previously summarized books, although I cannot personally approach with any high degree of confidence a work which can refer to Paul’s ‘faulty logic and equally faulty exegesis’, not to mention ‘the insufficiency of Paul’s spurious arguments’.⁷ Affirming in his Introduction that ‘the idea of sinister world powers and their subjugation by Christ is built into the very fabric of Paul’s thought’, Dr Caird goes on to isolate three principal ‘powers’. The first is ‘pagan religion and pagan power’, including the state, and he interprets Ephesians 3:10 as teaching that these have already begun to be redeemed through Christian social action. The second power is the law which is good in itself because it is God’s, yet when it is ‘exalted into an independent system of religion, it becomes demonic’.¹ The third power concerns those recalcitrant elements in nature which resist God’s rule, including wild animals, diseases, storms and the whole creation’s bondage to corruption. So ‘Paul’s view of man’s dilemma’ is as follows: ‘He lives under divinely appointed authorities—the powers of the state, the powers of legal religion, the powers of nature—which through sin have become demonic agencies. To expect that evil will be defeated by any of these powers, by the action of the state, by the self-discipline of the conscience, or by the processes of nature, is to ask that Satan cast out Satan. The powers can be robbed of their tyrannical influence and brought into their proper subjection to God only in the Cross’.

In his commentary on Ephesians published twenty years after *Principalities and Powers*, Dr Caird seems more willing to concede that Paul was referring to ‘spiritual beings who preside over all the forms and structures of power operative in the corporate life of men’. Indeed, ‘The real enemies are the spiritual forces that stand behind all institutions of government, and control the lives of men and nations.’⁴

The only other author I will mention by name is Dr Markus Barth, whose *The Broken Wall (A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians)* was published in 1959 and whose monumental two volumes in the *Anchor Bible* followed in 1974. In the former book he identifies the principalities and powers ‘by reference to four features of Paul’s thinking and terminology’, namely the state (political, judicial, ecclesiastical authorities), death, moral and ritual law, and economic structures including slavery. ‘We conclude that by principalities and powers Paul means the world of axioms and principles of politics and religion, of economics and society, of morals and biology, of history

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and culture', and therefore 'it is of the essence of the Gospel to include utterances concerning political, social, economic, cultural and psychological situations, dogmas and problems'.

In his later two-volume work, however, I get the distinct impression that Dr Barth is willing to allow Paul a continuing 'mythological' or 'superstitious' (as he thinks it) belief in supernatural powers. He seems to be seeking some kind of uneasy compromise between the two interpretations. Thus, 'Paul denotes the angelic or demonic beings that reside in the heavens', although there is a 'direct association of these heavenly principalities and powers with structures and institutions of life on earth'. Again, 'the "principalities and powers" are at the same time intangible spiritual entities and concrete historical, social or psychic structures or institutions'.⁷

My first reaction to this attempted reconstruction, of which I have given four examples, is to admire its ingenuity. The scholars concerned have used great skill in their determination to make Paul's obscure references to heavenly powers speak relevantly to our own earthly situations. Hence the attraction of this theory, which a number of authors of evangelical persuasion have also begun to adopt. But hence also its suspicious character. For some are sharing with us with great candour the two embarrassments which led them to embrace it. First, they say, the traditional interpretation reflected an archaic world-view, with angels and demons, not far removed from spooks and poltergeists. Secondly, they could find in the New Testament no allusion to social structures, which have become a significant modern preoccupation. Then suddenly a new theory is proposed which solves both problems simultaneously. We lose the demons and gain the structures, for the principalities and powers are structures in disguise!

It would be wrong, however, to reject the new theory because we may suspect the presuppositions which have led people to propound or accept it. What is needed on both sides is more serious exegetical work, for the new theory is 'not proven' and has failed, I would judge, to convince a majority of exegetes. All I can attempt here is an introductory critique. It is true that the vocabulary of 'principalities and powers' (*archai* and *exousiai*) is sometimes used in the New Testament of political authorities. For example, the Jewish priests sought some means to hand Jesus over 'to the authority and jurisdiction (*archē* and *exousia*) of the governor'. In that verse the words are singular. Also Jesus warned his followers that they would be brought before 'the rulers and the authorities', while Paul told his readers to be 'submissive to rulers and authorities' or 'to the governing authorities',⁹ in all of which verses the words *exousiai* and *archai* or *archontes* occur together and in the plural. Moreover, in each case the context makes it unambiguously clear that human authorities are in view.

In the other contexts, however, in which the same words are normally translated 'principalities and powers', it is by no means clear that the reference is to political structures or judicial authorities. On the contrary, the *a priori* assumption of generations of interpreters has been that they refer to supernatural beings. That they were given the same names and titles as human rulers need not surprise us, since they 'were thought of as having a political organization' and are 'rulers and functionaries of the spirit world'.² I confess to finding the reconstructions of the new theorists not only ingenious, but artificial to the point of being contrived.

Take the three main references to the principalities and powers in Ephesians. The natural interpretation of 1:20–21 is not that God has exalted Jesus far above all earthly rulers and institutions, thus making him 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (though he is that, and this thought may be included), since the realm in which he has been supremely exalted is specifically said to

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be 'in the heavenlies' at God's right hand. Next, it is to me extremely farfetched to suggest that in 3:10 Paul is really saying that it is to power structures on earth that God's manifold wisdom is made known through the church. For those who interpret it in this way, the allusion to 'the heavenly places' is again an awkward addition. And thirdly, the Christian's spiritual warfare is specifically stated to be 'not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers', which has till recent days been universally understood as meaning 'not with human but with demonic forces'. The allusions to 'the world rulers of this present darkness' and 'the spiritual hosts of wickedness', together with the armour and weapons needed to withstand them, fit supernatural powers much more naturally, especially in a context which twice mentions the devil (verses 11 and 16), while again there is the awkward addition of 'in the heavenly places'. In fact, I have not come across a new theorist who takes into adequate account the fact that all three references to the principalities and powers in Ephesians also contain a reference to the heavenly places, that is, the unseen world of spiritual reality. It is a stubborn fact, as if Paul were deliberately explaining who the principalities and powers are, and where they operate. Indeed, the six stages in the developing drama of the principalities and powers—their original creation, their subsequent fall, their decisive conquest by Christ, their learning through the church, their continued hostility and their final destruction—all seem to apply more naturally to supernatural beings than to structures, institutions and traditions.

Turning now from exegetical to theological considerations, nobody can deny that the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels believed in both demons and angels. It was not inevitable that he should have done so, because the Sadducees did not. But exorcism was an integral part of his ministry of compassion and one of the chief signs of the kingdom. It is also recorded that he spoke without inhibition about angels. So if Jesus Christ our Lord believed in them and spoke of them, it ill becomes us to be too embarrassed to do so. His apostles took this belief over from Jesus. Quite apart from the references to principalities and powers, there are numerous other allusions to angels by Paul, Peter and the author of Hebrews. Now commentators are free, if their theology permits them, to disagree with Jesus and his apostles, to dismiss their beliefs about supernatural intelligences as 'mythological' or 'superstitious', and to attempt to 'demythologize' their teaching. But this is a different exercise from the attempt to argue that our Lord and his apostles were not teaching what for centuries it has appeared to virtually all commentators they were teaching. Very strong exegetical reasons, and not just the appeal of the relevant, would be necessary to overthrow such an almost universal tradition of biblical understanding.

Finally, in reaffirming that the principalities and powers are personal supernatural agencies, I am not at all denying that they can use structures, traditions, institutions, *etc.* for good or ill; I am only wishing to avoid the confusion which comes from identifying them. That social, political, judicial and economic structures can become demonic is evident to anybody who has considered that the state, which in Romans 13 is the minister of God, in Revelation 13 has become an ally of the devil. Similarly, the moral law which God gave for human good led to human bondage and was exploited by 'the elemental spirits of the universe'. Every good gift of God can be perverted to evil use. But if we identify 'the powers' with human structures of one kind and another, serious consequences follow. First, we lack an adequate explanation why structures so regularly, but not always, become tyrannical. Secondly, we unjustifiably restrict our understanding of the malevolent activity of the devil, whereas he is too versatile to be limited to the structural. Thirdly,

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we become too negative towards society and its structures. For the Powers are evil, dethroned and to be fought. So if the Powers are structures, this becomes our attitude to structures. We find it hard to believe or say anything good about them, so corrupt do they appear. Advocates of the new theory warn us against deifying structures; I want to warn them against demonizing them. Both are extremes to avoid. By all means let the church as God's new society question the standards and values of contemporary society, challenge them, and demonstrate a viable alternative. But if God blesses her witness, some structures may become changed for the good; then what will happen to the new theology of the Powers?

3. The armour of God (verses 13–20)

The purpose of investing ourselves with the divine armour is *that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil* (verse 11), *that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore ...* This fourfold emphasis on the need to 'stand' or 'withstand' shows that the apostle's concern is for Christian stability. Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil. And Christians who shake like reeds and rushes cannot resist the wind when the principalities and powers begin to blow. Paul wants to see Christians so strong and stable that they remain firm even against the devil's wiles (verse 11) and even *in the evil day*, that is, in a time of special pressure. For such stability, both of character and in crisis, the armour of God is essential.

The expression *the whole armour of God* translates the Greek word *panoplia*, which is 'the full armour of a heavy-armed soldier' (AG), although 'the divineness rather than the completeness of the outfit is emphasized'.⁷ The point is that this equipment is 'forged and furnished' by God. In the Old Testament it is God himself, the Lord of Hosts, who is depicted as a warrior fighting to vindicate his people: *e.g.* 'He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head.' Still today the armour and weapons are his, but now he shares them with us. We have to put on the armour, take up the weapons and go to war with the powers of evil.

Paul details the six main pieces of a soldier's equipment—the belt, the breastplate, the boots, the shield, the helmet and the sword, and uses them as pictures of the truth, righteousness, good news of peace, faith, salvation and word of God which equip us in our fight against the powers. Paul was very familiar with Roman soldiers. He met many in his travels, and as he dictated Ephesians he was chained to one by the wrist. He refers to his chain in verse 20. And although it would be unlikely that such a bodyguard would wear the full armour of an infantryman on the battlefield, yet the sight of him close by may well have kindled his imagination.

In 1655 the Puritan minister William Gurnall, 'pastor of the church of Christ at Lavenham in Suffolk' (as he styled himself), published his treatise *The Christian in Complete Armour*. Its elaborate sub-title, for which one needs to draw a deep breath, is: *The saints' war against the Devil, wherein a discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and his people, in his policies, power, seat of his empire, wickedness, and chief design he hath against the saints; a magazine opened, from whence the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, helped on with his armour, and taught the use of his weapon; together with the happy issue of the whole war.* In his Dedication of the book to his parishioners he modestly refers to himself as their 'poor' and 'unworthy' minister and to his treatise as but a 'mite' and a 'little present' to them. Yet in my

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eighth edition of 1821 it runs to three volumes, 261 chapters and 1,472 pages, although it is an exposition of only eleven verses.

Let me give you a taste of Gurnall's spirituality. Regarding God's armour he writes: 'In heaven we shall appear not in armour but in robes of glory; but here they (sc. the pieces of armour specified) are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ.' In this armour we are to stand and watch, and never relax our vigilance, for 'the saint's sleeping time is Satan's tempting time; every fly dares venture to creep on a sleeping lion'.² He goes on to instance Samson (whose hair was cut by Delilah while he slept), King Saul (whose spear David stole while he was asleep), Noah (who was in some way abused by his son while he was in a drunken sleep) and Eutychus (who slept while Paul preached).

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in our own day has written a very fine and full exposition of the same eleven verses in two volumes entitled *The Christian Warfare* and *The Christian Soldier*, totalling 736 pages. His twenty-one chapters in the former volume on 'the wiles of the devil', which describe some of the devil's subtlest assaults upon the people of God (in the three realms of the mind, of experience and of practice or conduct) and how we need to be on our guard, are full of wise counsel from an experienced pastor.

The first piece of equipment which Paul mentions is the girdle of truth: *having girded your loins with truth* (verse 14). Usually made of leather, the soldier's belt belonged rather to his underwear than his armour. Yet it was essential. It gathered his tunic together and also held his sword. It ensured that he was unimpeded when marching. As he buckled it on, it gave him a sense of hidden strength and confidence. Belts and braces still do. To 'tighten one's belt' can mean not only to accept a time of austerity during a food shortage but also to prepare oneself for action, which the ancients would have called 'girding up their loins'.

Now the Christian soldier's belt is 'truth'. Many commentators, especially in the early centuries, understood this to mean 'the truth', the revelation of God in Christ and in Scripture. For certainly it is only the truth which can dispel the devil's lies and set us free, and Paul has in this letter several times referred to the importance and the power of the truth.⁵ Other commentators, however, especially because the definite article is absent in the Greek sentence, prefer to understand Paul to be referring to 'truth' in the sense of 'sincerity' or (NEB) 'integrity'. For certainly God requires 'truth in the inward being', and the Christian must at all costs be honest and truthful.⁶ To be deceitful, to lapse into hypocrisy, to resort to intrigue and scheming, this is to play the devil's game, and we shall not be able to beat him at his own game. What he abominates is transparent truth. He loves darkness; light causes him to flee. For spiritual as for mental health honesty about oneself is indispensable.

Perhaps we do not need to choose between these alternatives. The judicious Gurnall writes: 'Some by *truth* mean *a truth of doctrine*; others will have it *truth of heart, sincerity*; they I think best that comprise both ... one will not do without the other.'

The second item of the Christian's equipment is *the breastplate of righteousness* (verse 14). Some expositors have maintained that in God's armour, although there is a breastplate, no protection is provided for the back. They then go on to argue that we must face our enemy with courage and not run away from him, exposing our unguarded back. John Bunyan made this point in *Pilgrim's Progress*. When Christian reached the Valley of Humiliation, 'he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him', whose name was Apollyon. 'Then did Christian begin to be

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afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground. But he considered again that he had no armour for his back, and therefore thought, that to turn the back to him might give him greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts. Therefore he resolved to venture, and stand his ground.’ It is a good point of spiritual counsel, but remains a doubtful example of biblical exegesis, for the soldier’s breastplate often covered his back as well as his front, and was his major piece of armour protecting all his most vital organs.

In a previous letter Paul has written of ‘the breastplate of faith and love’, but here as in Isaiah 59:17 the breastplate consists of ‘righteousness’. Now ‘righteousness’ (*dikaiosynē*) in Paul’s letters more often than not means ‘justification’, that is, God’s gracious initiative in putting sinners right with himself through Christ. Is this then the Christian’s breastplate? Certainly no spiritual protection is greater than a righteous relationship with God. To have been justified by his grace through simple faith in Christ crucified, to be clothed with a righteousness which is not one’s own but Christ’s, to stand before God not condemned but accepted—this is an essential defence against an accusing conscience and against the slanderous attacks of the evil one, whose Hebrew name (‘Satan’) means ‘adversary’ and whose Greek title (*diabolos*, ‘devil’) means ‘slanderer’. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.’ This is the Christian assurance of ‘righteousness’, that is, of a right relationship with God through Christ; it is a strong breastplate to protect us against Satanic accusations.

On the other hand, the apostle wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:7 of ‘the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left’, apparently meaning moral righteousness, and has used the word in the same sense in Ephesians 4:24 and 5:9. So the Christian’s breastplate may be righteousness of character and conduct. For just as to cultivate ‘truth’ is the way to overthrow the devil’s deceits, so to cultivate ‘righteousness’ is the way to resist his temptations.

Alternatively, as with the two possible meanings of ‘truth’, so with the two possible meanings of ‘righteousness’, it may well be right to combine them, since according to Paul’s gospel the one would invariably lead to the other. As G. G. Findlay put it, ‘The completeness of pardon for past offence and the integrity of character that belong to the justified life, are woven together into an impenetrable mail.’

The gospel boots come next in the list. According to Markus Barth, there is agreement among the commentators that Paul ‘has in mind the *caliga* (“half-boot”) of the Roman legionary which was made of leather, left the toes free, had heavy studded soles, and was tied to the ankles and shins with more or less ornamental straps’. These ‘equipped him for long marches and for a solid stance ... While they did not impede his mobility, they prevented his foot from sliding.’

Now the Christian soldier’s boots are *the equipment of the gospel of peace* (verse 15). ‘Equipment’ translates *hetoimasia*, which means ‘readiness’, ‘preparation’ or ‘firmness’. The uncertainty is whether the genitive which follows is subjective or objective. If the former, the reference is to a certain firmness or steadfastness which the gospel gives to those who believe it, like the firmness which strong boots give to those who wear them. NEB takes it this way and translates: ‘Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, to give you a firm footing.’ And certainly if we have received the good news, and are enjoying the peace with God and with one another which it brings, we have the firmest possible foothold from which to fight evil.

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But the genitive may be objective, in which case the Christian soldier's shoes are his 'readiness to announce the Good News of peace' (GNB). There can be no doubt that we should always be ready to bear witness to Jesus Christ as God's peacemaker (2:14–15) and also—as Paul writes in a parallel passage in Colossians—to give gracious though 'salty' answers to the questions which 'outsiders' put to us. Such tip-toe readiness has a very stabilizing influence on our own lives, as well as introducing others to the liberating gospel. For myself I veer slightly towards this explanation, partly because of the Colossians parallel and partly because of the faint echoes of 2:17 ('He came and preached peace') and of Isaiah 52:7 ('How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace'). As Johannes Blauw has written, 'Missionary work is like a pair of sandals that have been given to the Church in order that it shall set out on the road and *keep on going* to make known the mystery of the gospel.'

In either case the devil fears and hates the gospel, because it is God's power to rescue people from his tyranny, both us who have received it and those with whom we share it. So we need to keep our gospel boots strapped on.

Our fourth piece of equipment is *the shield of faith* (verse 16) which we are to take up not so much 'above all' (AV), as if it were the most important of all weapons, but rather *besides all these*, as an indispensable addition. The word Paul uses denotes not the small round shield which left most of the body unprotected, but the long oblong one, measuring 1.2 metres by 0.75, which covered the whole person. Its Latin name was *scutum*. It 'consisted ... of two layers of wood glued together and covered first with linen and then with hide: it was bound with iron above and below.' It was specially designed to put out the dangerous incendiary missiles then in use, specially arrows dipped in pitch which were then lit and fired.

What, then, are *all the flaming darts of the evil one*, and with what shield can Christians protect themselves? The devil's darts no doubt include his mischievous accusations which inflame our conscience with what (if we are sheltering in Christ) can only be called false guilt. Other darts are unsought thoughts of doubt and disobedience, rebellion, lust, malice or fear. But there is a shield with which we *can quench* or extinguish all such fire-tipped darts. It is *the shield of faith*. God himself 'is a shield to those who take refuge in him', and it is by faith that we flee to him for refuge. For faith lays hold of the promises of God in times of doubt and depression, and faith lays hold of the power of God in times of temptation. Apollyon taunted Christian with the threat, 'Here will I spill thy soul.' 'And with that,' Bunyan continues, 'he threw a flaming dart at his breast; but Christian had a shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so prevented the danger of that.'⁸

The Roman soldier's helmet, which is the next piece of armour on the list, was usually made of a tough metal like bronze or iron. 'An inside lining of felt or sponge made the weight bearable. Nothing short of an axe or hammer could pierce a heavy helmet, and in some cases a hinged vizor added frontal protection.' Helmets were decorative as well as protective, and some had magnificent plumes or crests.

According to an earlier statement of Paul's, the Christian soldier's helmet is 'the hope of salvation', that is, our assurance of future and final salvation. Here in Ephesians it is just *the helmet of salvation* (verse 17) which we are to take and wear. But whether our head piece is that measure of salvation which we have already received (forgiveness, deliverance from Satan's bondage, and adoption into God's family) or the confident expectation of full salvation on the

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last day (including resurrection glory and Christ-likeness in heaven), there is no doubt that God's saving power is our only defence against the enemy of our souls. Charles Hodge wrote: 'that which adorns and protects the Christian, which enables him to hold up his head with confidence and joy, is the fact that he is saved' and, we might add, that he knows his salvation will be perfected in the end.

The sixth and last weapon to be specified is *the sword* (verse 17). Of all the six pieces of armour or weaponry listed, the sword is the only one which can clearly be used for attack as well as defence. Moreover, the kind of attack envisaged will involve a close personal encounter, for the word used is *machaira*, the short sword. It is *the sword of the Spirit*, which is then immediately identified as *the word of God*, although in the Revelation it is seen issuing from the mouth of Christ. This may well include the words of defence and testimony which Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would put into his followers' lips when they were dragged before magistrates.⁴ But the expression 'the word of God' has a much broader reference than that, namely to Scripture, God's written word, whose origin is repeatedly attributed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Still today it is his sword, for he still uses it to cut through people's defences, to prick their consciences and to stab them spiritually awake. Yet he also puts his sword into our hands, so that we may use it both in resisting temptation (as Jesus did, quoting Scripture to counter the devil in the Judean wilderness) and in evangelism. Every Christian evangelist, whether a preacher or a personal witness, knows that God's word has cutting power, being 'sharper than any two-edged sword'. We must never therefore be ashamed to use it, or to acknowledge our confidence that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit. As E. K. Simpson wrote, this phrase sets forth 'the trenchant power of Scripture ... But a mutilated Bible is what Moody dubbed it, "a broken sword" '.

Here, then, are the six pieces which together make up the whole armour of God: the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel boots and the faith shield, salvation's helmet and the Spirit's sword. They constitute God's armour, as we have seen, for he supplies it. Yet it is our responsibility to take it up, to put it on and to use it confidently against the powers of evil. Moreover, we must be sure to avail ourselves of every item of equipment provided and not omit any. 'Our enemies are on every side, and so must our armour be, on the right hand and on the left.

Finally, Paul adds prayer (verses 18–20), not (probably) because he thinks of prayer as another though unnamed weapon, but because it is to pervade all our spiritual warfare. Equipping ourselves with God's armour is not a mechanical operation; it is itself an expression of our dependence on God, in other words of prayer. Moreover, it is prayer *in the Spirit*, prompted and guided by him, just as God's word is 'the sword of the Spirit' which he himself employs. Thus Scripture and prayer belong together as the two chief weapons which the Spirit puts into our hands.

Prevailing Christian prayer is wonderfully comprehensive. It has four universals, indicated by the fourfold use of the word 'all'. We are to pray *at all times* (both regularly and constantly), *with all prayer and supplication* (for it takes many and varied forms), *with all perseverance* (because we need like good soldiers to *keep alert*, and neither give up nor fall asleep), *making supplication for all the saints* (since the unity of God's new society, which has been the preoccupation of this whole letter, must be reflected in our prayers). Most Christians pray sometimes, with some prayers and some degree of perseverance, for some of God's people. But to replace 'some' by

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‘all’ in each of these expressions would be to introduce us to a new dimension of prayer. It was when Christian ‘perceived the mouth of hell ... hard by the wayside’ in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and saw flame and smoke and heard hideous noises, that ‘he was forced to put up his sword, and betake himself to another weapon, called All-prayer: so he cried in my hearing, “O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.” ’

Perhaps most important is the command to stay awake and therefore alert (verse 18). It goes back to the teaching of Jesus himself. He emphasized the need for watchfulness in view of the unexpectedness both of his return and of the onset of temptation.¹ He seems to have kept repeating the same warning: ‘I say to you, Watch!’ The apostles echoed and extended his admonition. ‘Be watchful!’ was their general summons to Christian vigilance, partly because the devil is always on the prowl like a hungry lion, and false teachers like fierce wolves,³ and partly lest the Lord’s return should take us unawares, but especially because of our tendency to sleep when we should be praying.⁵ ‘Watch and pray’, Jesus urged. It was failure to obey this order which led the apostles into their disastrous disloyalty; similar failure leads to similar disloyalty today. It is by prayer that we wait on the Lord and renew our strength. Without prayer we are much too feeble and flabby to stand against the might of the forces of evil.

Pray *also for me*, Paul begged (verse 19). He was wise enough to know his own need of strength if he was to stand against the enemy, and humble enough to ask his friends to pray with him and for him. The strength he needed was not just for his personal confrontation with the devil, however, but for his evangelistic ministry by which he sought to rescue people from the devil’s dominion. This had been a part of his original commission when the risen Lord Jesus had told him to turn people ‘from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God’. Hence the spiritual conflict of which he was aware. Moreover he had not left the battlefield now that he was under house arrest and unable to continue his missionary expeditions. No, there were those soldiers to whom one by one, each for a shift of several hours on end, he was chained, and there were his constant visitors. He could still witness to them, and he did so. There must have been other individuals beside the fugitive slave Onesimus whom he led to faith in Christ. Luke tells of Jewish leaders who came to him at his lodging ‘in great numbers’, and who heard him expound ‘from morning till evening’ about the kingdom and about Jesus. ‘Some were convinced,’ Luke added. Thus Paul’s evangelistic labours went on. For ‘two whole years’ he ‘welcomed all who came to him’, he proclaimed ‘the kingdom of God and ... the Lord Jesus Christ’, and he did it ‘quite openly and unhindered’.⁸

It is those last words which we need specially to notice. For ‘quite openly’ translates the Greek phrase ‘with all *parrēsia*’. The word originally denoted the democratic freedom of speech enjoyed by Greek citizens. It then came to mean ‘outspokenness, frankness, plainness of speech, that conceals nothing and passes over nothing’, together with ‘courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank’ (AG). And this is precisely what Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that he may be given. Freedom is what he longs for—not freedom from confinement, but freedom to preach the gospel. So he uses the word *parrēsia* twice (first as a noun, then as a verb) in the expressions *opening my mouth boldly* (verse 19) in preaching the gospel, and *that I may declare it boldly*, as I ought to speak (verse 20). The good news he announces he still calls the *mystery*, because it has become known only by revelation, and centres

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on the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ; and the two major qualities he wants to characterize his preaching of it are 'utterance' (verse 19) and 'boldness' (verses 19–20).

The first of these two words seems to refer to the clarity of his communication, and the second to his courage. He is anxious to obscure nothing by muddled speech and to hide nothing by cowardly compromise. Clarity and courage remain two of the most crucial characteristics of authentic Christian preaching. For they relate to the content of the message preached and to the style of its presentation. Some preachers have the gift of lucid teaching, but their sermons lack solid content; their substance has become diluted by fear. Others are bold as lions. They fear nobody, and omit nothing. But what they say is confused and confusing. Clarity without courage is like sunshine in the desert: plenty of light but nothing worth looking at. Courage without clarity is like a beautiful landscape at night time: plenty to see, but no light by which to enjoy it. What is needed in the pulpits of the world today is a combination of clarity and courage, or of 'utterance' and 'boldness'. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray that these might *be given* to him, for he recognized them as gifts of God. We should join them in prayer for the pastors and preachers of the contemporary church.

It was for the gospel that he had become *an ambassador in chains* (verse 20). Earlier in the letter he has designated himself both 'a prisoner ... on behalf of you Gentiles' and 'a prisoner for the Lord' (3:1; 4:1). Thus he gives the gospel, the Lord and the Gentiles as three reasons for his imprisonment. Yet these three are one. For the good news he preached was of the Gentiles' inclusion in the new society, and it had been entrusted to him by the Lord. So by communicating it in its fullness he was being simultaneously faithful to the gospel itself, to the Lord who had revealed it to him and to the Gentiles who received its blessings. His faithfulness to these three had cost him his freedom. So he was a prisoner for all three. Perhaps now he was sometimes tempted to compromise in order to secure his release. For 'imprisonment brings its own special temptation to bow to the fear of man'. But if so, he was given grace to resist. 'Paul thinks of himself as the ambassador of Jesus Christ, duly accredited to represent his Lord at the imperial court of Rome'.¹ How could he be ashamed of his King or afraid to speak in his name? On the contrary, he was proud to be Christ's ambassador, even if he was experiencing the anomaly of being an 'ambassador in chains'. It is possible even that he deliberately plays on this paradox. Markus Barth writes: 'The term "chain" (*alusa*) signifies among other things the (golden) adornment(s) worn around the neck and wrists by rich ladies or high ranking men. On festive occasions ambassadors wear such chains in order to reveal the riches, power and dignity of the government they represent. Because Paul serves Christ crucified, he considers the painful iron prison chains as most appropriate insignia for the representation of his Lord.' What concerns Paul most, however, is not that his wrist may be unchained, but that his mouth may be opened in testimony; not that he may be set free, but that the gospel may be spread freely and without hindrance. It is for this, then, that he prays and asks the Ephesians to pray too. Against such prayer the principalities and powers are helpless.

13. Conclusion

6:21–24

Paul has reached the end of his letter, which he has been dictating. Perhaps at this point he takes the pen from his scribe and writes an authenticating sentence or two in his own handwriting. He

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certainly did this at the conclusion of his letters to the Galatians, the Thessalonians,² the Corinthians and the Colossians.⁴

To whom, then, has he been dictating? Probably to *Tychicus*, whom he now mentions affectionately by name. Tychicus was a native of Asia. Luke not only describes him as an 'Asian', but also brackets him with Trophimus, whom he later calls an 'Ephesian'.⁶ So Tychicus may have come from Ephesus too. Paul certainly sent him there during his second imprisonment in Rome, and reading between the lines of the Ephesian and Colossian letters Paul seems to assume that his readers know him already.

What is clear, whether or not Tychicus was Paul's scribe, is that Paul entrusts the letter to him to deliver, together with the Colossian Letter. For the apostle evidently has complete confidence in his younger colleague. *Beloved brother*, he calls him, and also *faithful minister in the Lord* (verse 21). He will rely on him not only to deliver the letters safely, but also to supplement their message with some personal news. He is sending him, he says, *that you also may know how I am and what I am doing; he will tell you everything* (verse 21). Indeed, *I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are* (verse 22). Thus three times Paul reiterates his intention that Tychicus will bring his readers up to date with news of him. This no doubt explains the unusual absence at the end of the letter of personal messages and greetings. Tychicus will convey them by word of mouth.

Then there is another reason for the visit of Tychicus to Ephesus and its neighbouring cities. He will deliver the letter, he will tell the church members how Paul is, and in addition Paul is sending him *that he may encourage your hearts*, (verse 22). It is touching to see the apostle's desire to forge stronger personal links between himself and these Asian Christians. His exposition of God's new society is no mere theological theory; for he and they are members of it themselves. So they must deepen their fellowship with one another—by praying for one another (he has recorded two of his prayers for them, in chapters 1 and 3, before requesting their prayers for him in verses 19 and 20), by his letter to them, and through Tychicus who would both bring them information about Paul and seek to encourage them. Prayer, correspondence and visits are still three major means by which Christians and churches can enrich one another and so contribute to the building up of the body of Christ.

It was the custom in the ancient world for correspondents to end their letters with a wish—usually a secular wish, even if the gods were invoked—for the reader's health or happiness. Paul sees no reason to abandon the convention in principle. But as he has Christianized the opening greeting, so now he Christianizes the final wish. Indeed, what he writes is half wish, half prayer. For the blessings he desires for his readers will come *from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. What blessings are these?

Paul's first prayer-wish is this: *Peace to the brethren, and love with faith* (verse 23). Peace has been a characteristic word of this letter. In the doctrinal section at the beginning he has explained how Jesus Christ 'is our peace' since he has broken down the dividing wall and created a single new humanity, 'so making peace', and how he then 'came and preached peace'. Consequently, in the ethical section which follows Paul has begged them both to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' and to 'forbear one another in love' (4:2–3), indeed to 'walk in love as Christ loved us' (5:2). Peace and love belong together, for peace is reconciliation and love is its source and outflow. Paul paints a beautiful picture of the church fellowship and the Christian home

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pervaded with love and peace, even though no peace treaty can ever be negotiated with the principalities and powers of evil. When he adds to 'love' the words 'with faith', he is probably thinking of faith as a characteristic they already have, rather than as another he wants them to be given. For 'faith they had; Paul's prayer was that love might be connected with it'.

Paul's second prayer-wish is this: *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying*. By this expression he characterizes his Christian readers in terms of their love for Christ. The letter's final words in the Greek sentence mean simply 'in incorruption' (*en aphtharsiā*). Most commentators understand them as a qualification of people's love for Christ and so as a restriction on the grace of God. In this case, the prayer is that God's grace may accompany those who love Christ *with love undying* or 'with unfailing love' (NEB). Other commentators have not felt such a limitation to be congruous with Paul's conclusion. They therefore suggest attaching the phrase rather to God's grace than to Christians' love. In this case, the prayer is that all who love our Lord Jesus Christ may experience God's grace 'in immortality' or 'for ever'. If this is correct, then 'the epistle which opened with a bold glance into the eternal past closes with the outlook of an immortal hope'.

Of the four words 'peace', 'love', 'faith', and 'grace' which are included in the apostle's final greeting, the two which stand out as particularly appropriate are 'grace' and 'peace'. The apostle began his letter by wishing his readers 'grace ... and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (1:2); he now ends it with a similar reference to grace and peace. No two words could summarize the message of the letter more succinctly. For 'peace' in the sense of reconciliation with God and one another is the great achievement of Jesus Christ, and 'grace' is the reason why and the means by which he did it. Moreover, both are indispensable to all members of God's new society. Hence Paul's wishing of peace to 'the brethren' (verse 23), who belong to each other as brothers and sisters in the family of God, and of grace to 'all' those who love Christ, without discrimination, whatever their race, rank, age or sex. It is a wish, a prayer, that the members of God's new society may live in harmony as brothers and sisters in his family, at peace and in love with him and with each other, together with a recognition that only by his grace can this dream come true.

I venture, then, as we conclude our study of this letter to the Ephesians, to make Paul's words my own and address them to you my readers: 'Peace be to the brothers and sisters' and 'grace be with you all'.⁸

IDEAL SELF

Accepting Our Roots

Jesus' family tree hides nothing. His heritage was multiethnic and included several unattractive or embarrassing individuals. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding His own birth might have raised questions in the minds of some. But Jesus never denied His ancestry or allowed others to shame Him. If we want to be like Him, we need to understand and accept our

⁸ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 195–291). InterVarsity Press.

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roots in terms of culture, race, gender, and reputation. Moreover, like Jesus we want to avoid demeaning anyone else's heritage.

Admitting Our Vulnerability

Matthew's inclusion of the temptation of Jesus is remarkable. It shows that the sinless Lord of the universe was tempted, just as we are (Heb. 4:15–16). If we want to be like Jesus, we must accept that temptation is real—as is the possibility of overcoming temptation. But we need to be open about our struggles. In doing so we honor God, recognize the power of sin, and encourage others to do likewise.

Affirm Others

Jesus invested Himself in the development of other people, particularly the Twelve. He gave them responsibility and authority, resisting the temptation to get the job done “right” by doing it Himself. In doing so, He accepted the risk that they might fail. Of course, He gave them adequate preparation before sending them out, and on their return He affirmed them on their successful completion of the mission. Jesus calls us to help others grow. If we want to be like Him, we will share the joys and risks of working together with our brothers and sisters.

Commit Ourselves to Other Believers

John the Baptist was not your average individual. He was an unexpected child. He lived in the wilderness—the “other side of the tracks” for that day. He wore strange clothing and ate strange food. He was pugnacious, even offensive at times. Yet he helped launch Jesus' career. In return, Jesus had nothing but praise for him (Matt. 11:7–15). If we want to be like Jesus, we must not pick and choose our brothers and sisters in God's family. We need to embrace other believers and demonstrate our unity in Christ, no matter how awkward or inconvenient.

Radical Change Needed

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained the values of the kingdom. Money, prayer, relationships, possessions, information, and power were a few of the categories He redefined from God's perspective. He showed that following Him will involve radical change for most of us. It may mean undoing the way we've always done things and rethinking traditional sources of wisdom from our parents and culture. To become like Jesus involves a tough-minded review of our values and a thorough change in our behavior.

Engaging the World's Pain

Jesus' entry into human life was fraught with awkward tensions and human dilemmas: a miraculous but nevertheless embarrassing conception, an earthly father who was considering a quiet divorce, an outraged king resorting to infanticide, an early childhood in a strange culture, and a return to a homeland that remained hostile and dangerous. We, too, are all born into some troubles and circumstances. If we want to be like Jesus, we need to face up to the world and remain very much in it, despite all its troubles.

The Word Plus the Walk

Jesus' life was not an open book, readable by all. To be sure, He lived a perfect, model life. But even that could not stand alone as an undeniable witness. His actions needed interpretation. So He supplemented His good deeds with good news. In the same way, we need to verbally declare our faith if we want to be like Christ. Certainly we need to back up our words with a Christlike lifestyle. But what we tell others gives meaning to our quiet walk and good deeds.

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Serving Others

The Sermon on the Mount was immediately followed by “deeds in the valley.” Christlike values lead to servant actions—and it was obedient action that Jesus cared about, not just sermonizing (Matt. 7:21–29). Jesus modeled how to do the will of God by actively serving more than twenty-five different people (Matt. 8–9). These included such undesirables as lepers, an officer of the Roman occupation troops, the sick, the demon-possessed, cave dwellers, tax collectors, and a diseased, outcast woman. If we want to be like Jesus, we need to befriend those who are weak, under oppression, or without Christ. Like Him, we need to become “a friend of sinners” (Matt. 11:19). He offered much more than religious information—He served them.

Time for a Checkup

How can we evaluate the quality of our faith? Are there any ways to assess spiritual progress and growth? Yes, Paul gives us a number of them in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians can be viewed as two halves of one big picture about giving and receiving faith. Ephesians 1–3 describe what God has done for us in Christ. Ephesians 4–6 describe what we are to do in response to what God has done for us.

We are called to live for God and to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), just as children follow after the patterns seen in their parents. Here are some of the patterns that a godly lifestyle would include:

- Living in love, which means giving of ourselves sacrificially for the benefit of others, just as Christ has done for us (Eph. 5:2).
- Forsaking selfish pursuits such as self-seeking immorality and ruthless greed (Eph. 5:3, 5).
- Replacing filthy talk, flippant chatter, and unkind jesting with communication rooted in thanksgiving to God and affirmation of others (Eph. 5:4, 20).
- Exercising discernment about what we are told so as not to be susceptible to trickery from others (Eph. 5:6–7, 15).
- Bowing out from situations where evil is the agenda (Eph. 5:11–12).
- Managing our time well (Eph. 5:16).

Perhaps you’ll want to develop your own list of Christlike patterns from this passage and others. Consider asking a close believing friend to assess your progress over several days or weeks. Allow these patterns of godliness to affect your own life before using them to evaluate others (Matt. 7:1–6).

For more on this topic, see SERVICE, “*Leadership with Humility*,” page 364.⁹

1 PETER

AN EXEGESIS OF A PIVOTAL PASSAGE

⁹ Thomas Nelson Publishers. (2001). In [*What does the Bible say about... The ultimate A to Z resource fully illustrated*](#) (pp. 211–212). Thomas Nelson.

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3:1 The distinctive behavior of the Christian wife is signaled at once by the key expression “likewise,” which applies to the wife and also to the husband (vv. 1, 7). Both follow Jesus, the Suffering Servant, whose suffering ultimately led to healing. Both are servants, seeking to serve one another and others for Christ’s sake.

3:1, 2 Words come easy; yet a wife’s “gentle and quiet spirit” is the healing agent her husband needs (vv. 3, 4). She is allowed the same incredible privilege given to the Lord Jesus, to suffer in order to bring healing to another. Although the reference given is specifically concerning a non-believing husband, the application is also for the Christian husband who is being disobedient to the Lord in a certain area of his life. The wife’s “conduct” or lifestyle is to be accompanied by “fear” or reverence in the sense of respect.

3:3, 4 The idea is not that outward appearance is unimportant but rather that the inward qualities are more important. Outward beauty is corruptible; inward beauty, incorruptible. This hidden beauty of the heart is displayed by a “gentle and quiet spirit” (v. 4). This quality is not a reference to genetically acquired personality traits, such as being a person of few words, but rather to an inner attitude marked by the absence of anxiety, coupled with a trust in God as the blessed controller of all things. “Precious” (Gk. *timē*, lit. “value” or “price”) is used elsewhere in 1 Peter: the shed blood of Jesus Christ is “precious” (1 Pet. 1:19), and He is the “precious” cornerstone of our faith (1 Pet. 2:6). A woman characterized by a “gentle and quiet spirit” is not only precious to God and a glory to her husband but also a joy to all who are around her!

3:5, 6 Sarah is an example of a woman who trusted God and obeyed her husband. Abraham lied in identifying Sarah as his sister and not his wife (Gen. 20:1–18), and Sarah was immediately taken into the king’s harem! Sarah was not trusting Abraham; he had been deceptive and more concerned with saving himself than protecting his wife. Sarah trusted God by giving Him time to work in Abraham’s life and in this difficult situation. God intervened and told Abimelech in a dream that Sarah was Abraham’s wife. Obviously, if Abimelech had attempted to force Sarah into a sexual liaison, she would have had to tell him the truth and say a definite “no” to intimacy. Sarah is our example because she trusted her sovereign God by giving Him time to work.

3:7 Husbands, as wives, are obliged to follow Christ’s example. The first stated duty for husbands is to dwell with their wives with “understanding” (Gk. *kata gnōsin*, lit. “according to knowledge”). The considerate attitude described for husbands likely includes knowledge of God’s plan for marriage as well as a personalized understanding of the needs, desires, and goals of their own respective wives. Second, husbands are to give “honor” (Gk. *timē*, lit. “precious”) to their wives—respecting and esteeming them (see vv. 3, 4, note). According to Peter, wives are “weaker,” possibly an allusion to the fact that a woman’s physical strength is not usually equal to her husband’s. Both have the dignity of being “heirs together of the grace of life.” This realization is the key to mutuality in marriage (see also Eph. 5:21). A husband’s failure to treat his wife with dignity and love would hinder his relationship not only with her but also with God.

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SUBMISSION

Definition	Method	Example	Rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An attitude of the will 	<p>“As to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22)</p>	<p>Jesus: He had no other purpose (Heb. 10:7).</p>	<p>A vibrant witness (1 Pet. 3:1)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than obedience 	<p>“To your own husbands” (Eph. 5:22; 1 Pet. 3:1)</p>	<p>To submit was joy (Ps. 40:7, 8).</p>	<p>A means of glorifying God (1 Pet. 3:5, 6)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resting, leaning, trusting, abandoning yourself to the Lord 	<p>An act of the will (1 Pet. 3:1, 2)</p>	<p>He did not consider His will (John 5:30).</p>	<p>A means for teaching spiritual truths (Eph. 5:25–32)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void of stubbornness 	<p>Extends to “everything” (Eph. 5:24)</p> <p>Patterned after the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:25–32)</p> <p>A response to love (Eph. 5:24, 25)</p> <p>Extends to everyone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The church to Christ (Eph. 5:24) • All believers to God (Heb. 12:9; James 4:7), to spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:17), to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13), to one another (Eph. 5:21); • Wives to husbands (Eph. 5:22, 24; Col. 3:18; 	<p>Mary: “Let it be to me” (Luke 1:38)</p> <p>Esther: “I will go . . . if I perish, I perish” (Esth. 4:16).</p>	<p>A way to train children (Titus 2:3–5)</p> <p>The object of human love and divine protection (Eph. 5:25; 1 Pet. 3:7)</p> <p>A way to increase worth (1 Pet. 3:4)</p> <p>A means for liberating creativity (1 Pet. 3:7)</p>

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- Titus 2:5;
- 1 Pet. 3:1, 5);
- Children to parents
(Eph. 6:1–3);
- Slaves to masters
(Titus 2:9;
1 Pet. 2:18)

SUBMISSION: AS UNTO THE LORD

Submission means to put all of yourself—understandings, knowledge, opinions, feelings, energies—at the disposal of a person in authority over you. This never means subjecting yourself to abusive tyranny, nor does it suggest mindless acquiescence to the whims of another. It is the yielding of humble and intelligent obedience—without suggestion of inferiority or worthlessness. A wife’s deference to her husband is a duty owed to the Lord. A wife’s submission is not as much to her husband, a mere man, as it is to God and His plan for marriage.

Relationships in life are merely the classroom for teaching submission to the will of God. The word translated “submissive” (Gk. *hupotassō*) means literally “to place under,”—for example, husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5), parents (Luke 2:51), masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18), secular authorities (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13), and church officials (1 Pet. 5:5). The word is also used with respect to God (1 Cor. 15:28; Heb. 12:9; James 4:7) and to Christ (Eph. 5:24).

The Book of Esther provides a possible study in submission. Queen Vashti—self-ruled, greedy, selfish, cowardly—was unwise in disobeying Ahasuerus, who was not only her husband but also her king. She sought to cover her disobedience with the pretense of propriety and attempted to hide her pride with a show of modesty. The text gives no evidence that Ahasuerus did any more than give a ridiculous and distasteful command. Obedience only to “reasonable requests” is selfish license, not good judgment.

On the other hand, Esther was obedient, grateful, selfless, and courageous. She was a member of a minority race, an orphan child bereft of family and friends and saddled with awesome and fearful responsibility. Yet Esther rose to the occasion with an inner beauty of spirit and unshaking commitment to God’s providence. She was obedient to her foster father (Esth. 2:20), cooperative with authorities over her (Esth. 2:8, 9, 15), and submissive to her husband (Esth. 2:17; 5:2–4; 8:3).

See also Esth. 1:15–22; Heb. 13:17; notes on Complementarity (Eph. 5); Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Obedience (Philem.); Wives (Prov. 31); portraits of Esther (Esth. 2); Sarai (Gen. 11); Vashti (Esth. 1)

3:9 Many relationships develop an “evil for evil” or insult for insult pattern of interaction. Peter noted that to achieve intimacy, both parties must cultivate Christ’s pattern of rendering a blessing when experiencing hurt or unjust treatment (1 Pet. 2:21–24). This response is a distinctive characteristic of the Christian ethic (see Matt. 5:43–46; Rom. 12:17–21). Peter gave three reasons for this unusual response to hurt (1 Pet. 3:9–12). First, the one who gives a blessing to others will receive a blessing in return (v. 9). Second, positive responses produce an attitude of enjoyment and love for life (v. 10). Third, God hears the prayers of those who follow this pattern and turns His face against those who do not (v. 12). Seeking peace and pursuing it by disciplining one’s tongue has practical rewards and is wise in all relationships (v. 11)¹⁰

CHILDREN: OBEDIENCE: *DO IT GOD’S WAY*

Children are to obey both their parents. This relationship exists “in the Lord,” and the implication is that children and parents live under the authority of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:1). Children cannot be subject to their parents in a way that is contrary to the obedience they owe to Jesus Christ. They should obey their parents because this is “right” in God’s eyes, as illustrated by the fourth Commandment (vv. 1, 2). A child’s education would typically include the Ten Commandments; so Paul is drawing attention to truth children would already know. The word “honor” includes the ideas of respect and esteem (v. 2). Life lived in submission to legitimate authority would benefit the child with a better and longer life (v. 3; see Deut 5:16). The term “father” can be used to represent both parents (see similar usage in Heb. 11:23). Unreasonable demands by parents will provoke children to anger and can push them to perpetual bitterness with the result that children lose hope of ever performing well enough to please (Col 3:21). Parents should instead rear their children in an atmosphere of nurturing: godly training in what is right, correction of what is wrong, and encouragement at every turn.

See also chart on The Ten Commandments Throughout Scripture; notes on Children (Ps. 128); Parenthood (Prov. 10)

5:18 The command to be filled applies to all believers. The passive voice of the verb indicates that this is not a manufactured experience; the Holy Spirit fills and controls them. Further, the present tense of the command indicates that there can be many, successive fillings. This filling is not to be confused with the “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurs at the point of conversion.

5:19–21 As a result of the Spirit’s filling, believers will communicate with one another in an edifying manner. The Greek verb used includes all sorts of speech—singing of “psalms” (OT

¹⁰ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [The Woman’s Study Bible](#) (1 Pe 3:9). Thomas Nelson.

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psalms), “hymns” (praises composed by Christians), and “spiritual songs” (spontaneous, Spirit-inspired praise). Second, they will sing praises to the Lord (see chart, Hymns and Songs Associated with Women). Third, they will continually give thanks to the Father (Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Fourth, they will mutually submit to one another.

5:22–6:9 As Paul elaborated on the subject of submission, he showed what would happen in specific relationships within the family (see 1 Pet. 3, Submission; charts, Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission).

5:22–24 The exhortation specifies that wives are to submit themselves to their “own” husbands (v. 22). Paul in no way suggests that wives are inferior to their husbands or that they, as women, must submit to all other men. The wife’s submission is voluntary rather than forced (v. 22). God does not ask a wife to submit herself to her husband in violation of her Christian responsibility to walk in holiness and righteousness before Him. The marriage relationship is raised to lofty heights as Paul compared it to the relationship of Christ and His church (v. 23). The husband is not the Savior of the wife’s body. Nevertheless, the analogy holds that the husband is to be the protector of his wife (see Gen. 2:15–17, note). In voluntary submission, the wife can serve her husband, just as the church serves Christ, with freedom and dignity.

ROLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Original Relationship: Creation	Distortion of the Relationship: The Fall	Restoration of the Relationship: Redemption
Man and woman are perfectly related to one another and to God (Gen. 2:25).	The relationship between the man and the woman and their relationship to God are distorted by the presence of sin (Gen. 3:7, 8).	Jesus Christ as Redeemer models both servant leadership for the man and selfless submission for the woman (Eph. 5:23–27; Phil. 2:5–8).

According to the egalitarian position, no difference existed between the man and the woman prior to the Fall. They were equal in personhood (as is also true in the complementarian position) and the same in role and function (while the complementarian position maintains a difference in role assignment for the man and for the woman).

See also Gen. 1:26; 2:24; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22–24, 25–31, notes; notes on Headship (Gen. 1); The Creation of the Woman (Gen. 2); Complementarity (Eph. 5); Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

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[NOTE: RED FLAG IF THE HUSBAND/WIFE CONVERSATION BECOMES ALL MALES/TO ALL FEMALES CENTERED. PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT MARRIAGE, NOT THE SPHERE OF LIFE.]

[ROLES:

5:25–31 Paul’s exhortation is equally clear to husbands: **They are to love their wives (an admonition expressed six times in vv. 25–33)** in the same manner in which Christ sacrificially loved the church (v. 25). Husbands must not be “bitter” or harsh with their wives (Col. 3:19). Christ’s love for His church is presently manifested in His work of atonement (Eph. 5:25) and sanctification (v. 26) so that He might in the end times present her as a pure and spotless bride (v. 27). Returning to the marriage relationship, Paul explained that the husband should love his wife as his own body because the two are actually one (v. 28; see Gen. 2:24). “Body” is used here, as elsewhere, to refer to the whole person (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 1:20). **God prescribed that marriage provide a picture of the ultimate and eternal love between Christ and His church.**

5:33 Paul summarized by reminding each husband to love his own wife sacrificially as himself and by reminding each wife to show respect to her husband as the God-ordained leader of the family “as to the Lord” (v. 22; see charts, Role Relationship Between Men and Women; Theological Foundation for Headship).

COMPLEMENTARITY: *EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT*

Male and female were created as equal and complementary expressions of the image of God. Both bear His image fully, though in different ways. Their different roles in relationship to each other provide a picture of who God is and how He relates to His people.

Christ Jesus is equal with God the Father, yet submissive and responsive to Him (Phil. 2:6–8). God the Father loves the Son and exalts Him. The pattern is repeated in the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ provides loving, servant leadership; the church responds with respect and submission as Christ’s “Bride” (Eph. 5:22–33). Another counterpart to the picture is the relationship between church leaders and local bodies of believers (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Sin has distorted the relationship between man and woman at every level, but believers are called to relate according to the Creator’s plan instituted in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world (Gen. 2:15–25). This plan is marked by a holy reciprocity in which the husband’s loving headship awakens a responsive submission from the wife just as a wife’s submissive cooperation draws from her husband sensitive leadership. The realities of headship and submission are to be enacted within loving, equal, complementary male-female roles. In this, the image of God is properly reflected.

See also Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; charts on Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission; notes on Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

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FATHERHOOD: *PROTECTOR AND PROVIDER*

The earliest concept of God for a child is greatly impacted by the relationship she has with her own father. Fathers in the Bible were the supreme authoritative figures in their families. With but a word they could determine the fate of their offspring. In contrast to this autocratic image of fatherhood, Paul's advice to fathers emphasizes patience (Eph. 6:4). The father Jesus describes, just as our heavenly Father, loves unconditionally, forgives without strings attached, and gives abundantly (Luke 15:11–32).

Still, Scripture presents a tender side to fatherhood: A temple official came to Jesus frantic for his daughter's healing (Matt. 9:18–26); Jacob and David displayed deep sorrow at the loss of their sons (Gen. 37:33–35; 2 Sam. 13:35–39); both Noah and Joseph (the father of Jesus) followed God's direction and provided escapes from danger for their children (Gen. 7:5; Matt. 2:13–23). Biblical fathers were not perfect; they made mistakes. Eli did not set limits for his sons (1 Sam. 2:12; 3:13); David did not spend much time with his sons, nor did he live an exemplary life before them (2 Sam. 12:13, 14; 24:10). The best earthly father is one who has a vibrant fellowship with the heavenly Father and thus has access to the Lord's unlimited wisdom and vast resources (Eph. 5:15, 16).

A mother helps to fashion a good father. She makes him feel loved and accepted, treating him with respect. She shows respect for his position of leadership. She does not undermine his authority. She offers encouragement, reflective interaction, and supportive interest.

Fathers certainly are reminded of the importance of making their children feel wanted (Ps. 127:3–5). Fathers are to instruct their children (Deut. 6:1–9; Prov. 4:1; 6:20), train them (Ps. 78:5–7; Prov. 22:6), and correct them (Prov. 13:24). The shelter and security provided by a godly father should give freedom for growth without overprotection from challenges or tasks that teach responsibility (1 Sam. 3:1–10).

See also notes on Family (Gen. 32; 1 Sam. 3; Ps. 78; 127); Fatherhood of God (Rom. 8); Husbands (Job 31; 2 Cor. 6); Motherhood (1 Sam. 1; Is. 49; Ezek. 16); Parenthood (Prov. 10); Patriarchy (Gen. 28)

6:5–8 Slaves had no option about obedience, except when to obey their masters would violate their obedience to Christ. Paul understood that slaves were considered the legal property of their masters. However, he addressed them on an equal level and with the same courtesy extended to their masters. Nowhere in Scripture is slavery presented as a divinely established institution. The service of slaves should be characterized by a deep desire to avoid

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poor workmanship, as in any other vocation, and by sincerity of heart (lit. “singleness”), meaning the absence of duplicity. They should serve eagerly, as if they were serving Christ Himself, knowing that this is only an “earthly” (Gk. *kata sarkon*, “according to the flesh”) relationship and that God will fully reward their faithfulness (Col. 3:24). Such rewards are never dependent upon social status. Thus the principles are also appropriate in employment relationships (see Prov. 24, Employment; chart, Women in the Workplace).

6:9 Christian masters should treat their slaves with fairness and consideration, just as they themselves would wish to be treated (see chart, The Bible and Abuse).

SPIRITUAL WARFARE: *THE ARMOR OF GOD*

When a woman becomes a child of God, she not only inherits God’s blessings but God’s enemies as well. The Lord’s foremost enemy is Satan, whose purpose is to destroy His work (John 8:44), but Jesus came in order to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

Satan is a fallen angel (Is. 14:12–15) and as such is only a created being. He is in no way equal to God, the Creator. While Satan is superior in intellect and strength to mankind, he is inferior to God in every way. Believers have the power of the indwelling resurrected Christ over them and protecting them (1 John 4:4).

In addition, believers have been given the whole armor of God “to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Each piece of the armor is to be “put on” to help believers overcome the temptations and attacks of the Evil One.

1) *Having Girded Your Waist With Truth* (Eph. 6:14): The waist or abdomen area was generally thought to be the seat of emotions. To gird this area with truth is to commit your emotions to believe the truth. Often a person knowingly allows herself to believe a lie because of fear or self-pity. Believers must hold a commitment to truth regardless of the repercussions (John 8:32, 36).

2) *Having Put On the Breastplate of Righteousness* (Eph. 6:14): The breast is generally thought of as the place of the soul. The heart must be kept pure and righteous because sin gives a foothold to the enemy. Confession and forgiveness on the basis of the blood of Christ cleanse the heart (1 John 1:9).

3) *Having Shod Your Feet With the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace* (Eph. 6:15): Proper shoes enable the feet to go from place to place. The believer is to be about her Father’s business, which is to spread the gospel of peace and reconciliation. An undaunted sense of this mission keeps the believer headed in the right direction (Matt. 28:19, 20).

4) *Taking the Shield of Faith* (Eph. 6:16): The Wicked One is “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10) and will send his fiery darts to instill doubt, fear, and guilt. Faith acts as an invisible shield that deflects such false accusations (Heb. 11:6).

5) *Take the Helmet of Salvation* (Eph. 6:17): A helmet protects the head, that is, the brain and thoughts. Assurance of salvation is a mighty defense against doubt and insecurity and the kinds of works bred by them (1 John 5:11–13).

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6) *Take the Sword of the Spirit* (Eph. 6:17): The Word of God, the only offensive weapon in this armor, was used by the Lord Jesus against Satan (Luke 4:1–13). The living Word is powerful, effective, and instructive (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

7) *Praying Always* (Eph. 6:18): Prayer opens the channels between us and God. In the midst of battle, we as believers must keep in constant communication with our Leader for directions and encouragement. Our prayers for one another are important and effectual (James 5:16).

See also Neh. 4–7; Mark 5:2, note; Luke 11:14–26; Rom. 3:23, note; 2 Cor. 10:3–5; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; chart on Strategies in Spiritual Warfare; note on Temptation (Heb. 2)

6:11 Satan's wiles or schemings are directed against the church corporately (Eph. 4:2, 21, 31–32; 5:5) and believers personally (Acts 5:3; 10:38; 1 Tim. 4:1–5). The devil lives up to his name through falsely accusing believers before God (1 John 2:1, 2; Rev. 12:9) and maligning God before believers (Gen. 3:1), as well as through stirring up turmoil in the world by his accusations (James 3:13–16; chart, Names for Satan; A Portrait of the Adversary).

An Expanded Exegesis on Ephesians 6

6:14 The picture of God's armor is of a Roman soldier's tunic, pulled up and tucked into his belt so that he could fight or work unhindered. Living a life of honesty and integrity enables the Christian to be one in purpose with Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, and to be unhindered in the battle against Satan, who is a deceiver and liar (see chart, A Portrait of the Adversary). The breastplate covered the body from neck to thigh and was usually made of bronze. Believers do not need to seek protection or right standing with God through works of their own; they can confidently stand in what Christ has done in their behalf (2 Cor. 5:21).

6:15 The soldier wore sandals with cleats made of sharp nails designed to give firm footing on even the most rugged terrain. "Preparation" may have the sense of readiness to share the gospel to others at a moment's notice. "Preparation" may also refer to a prepared foundation that consists of the gospel of peace with God (Eph. 2:17).

6:16 This long, oblong, or oval shield was crafted from two layers of wood covered with linen or animal hides, bound together with iron. When fighting side by side, soldiers could hold these shields together to form a long wall. Soaked in water, they served as adequate defense against the enemy's "fiery darts"—arrows that had been dipped in pitch and ignited. The shield of faith offers God's unlimited resources of power and wisdom (3:16–21) to resist the fiery darts of distressing circumstances and temptation to evil (1 Cor. 10:13).

6:17 The soldier's bronze helmet had leather attachments to hold it in place. Christians can experience protection from Satan's attacks as they rest confidently in their position as members of God's family (John 1:12, 13), set apart for His purposes (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13). Further, they can know God's present work of sanctification in their lives, experiencing deliverance from sin (Gal. 5:16; Phil. 2:12, 13;

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Col. 1:10) and having the guarantee of future, eternal deliverance from every kind of evil (1 Thess. 5:8). The short, two-edged sword enabled the heavily-armed soldier to attack deftly and defeat his enemy at close range. The believer's sword may be understood to be either "supplied by the Spirit" or "used by the Spirit." Paul further identified this sword as "the word of God" (see Heb. 4:12). "Word" (Gk. *rhema*) most probably refers to specific sections of Scripture the Holy Spirit brings to mind to meet a particular need. Jesus' use of specific sections of Deuteronomy in His encounter with Satan in the wilderness exemplifies this (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

6:18 Prayer is not listed as a separate weapon of warfare but is rather given an all-encompassing status. Prayer is to be constant (1 Thess. 5:17) as the Christian prepares for battle, engages in it, and rests from it. All kinds of prayer are to be offered through the power of the Holy Spirit.

11

TIME FOR A CHECKUP

CONSIDER THIS 5:1–18 How can we evaluate the quality of our faith? Are there any ways to assess spiritual progress and growth? Yes, Paul gives us a number of them here in

Eph. 5.

Ephesians can be viewed as two halves of one big picture about giving and receiving faith. Chapters 1–3 describe what God has done for us in Christ. Chapters 4–6 describe what we are to do in response to what God has done for us.

We are called to live for God and to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), just as children follow after the patterns seen in their parents. Here are some of the patterns that a godly lifestyle would include:

- (1) Living in love, which means giving of ourselves sacrificially for the benefit of others, just as Christ has done for us (5:2).
- (2) Forsaking selfish pursuits such as self-seeking immorality and ruthless greed (5:3, 5).
- (3) Replacing filthy talk, flippant chatter, and unkind jesting with communication rooted in thanksgiving to God and affirmation of others (5:4, 20).
- (4) Exercising discernment about what we are told so as not to be susceptible to trickery from others (5:6–7, 15).
- (5) Bowing out from situations where evil is the agenda (5:11–12).
- (6) Managing our time well (5:16).

Perhaps you'll want to develop your own list of Christlike patterns from this passage and others. Consider asking a close believing friend to assess your progress

¹¹ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [The Woman's Study Bible](#) (Eph 5:18–6:11). Thomas Nelson.

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over several days or weeks. Allow these patterns of godliness to affect your own life before using them to evaluate others (Matt. 7:1–6).

The New Testament offers several portraits of what a godly lifestyle would look like. See “New Creatures with New Character” at Gal. 5:22–23.

A Lifestyle of Submission

A CLOSER LOOK 5:21 *Christ calls His people to a lifestyle of submission instead of selfish ambition (Eph 5:21). The New Testament teaches that believers are to submit themselves to God, to their leaders, and to other believers. But what exactly does that mean? See “Submission” at James 4:7.*

CONSIDER THIS 5:21–6:4

THE FAMILY: A CALL TO LONG-TERM WORK

“Family planning” is a controversial topic to-day that evokes strong feelings and images. But there is a place for “biblical family planning” in light of the reality of family life as a decades-long process to which God calls His people. Indeed, the family, along with work, is a focal point of life as God has designed it. That’s why Paul devoted so much space in Ephesians to the issues of married couples (Eph. 5:22–33), children (6:1–3), and fathers (6:4).

If a couple marry in their mid-20s and live into their mid-70s still married, they will spend 50 or more years of life together. That’s a substantial commitment! One would never enter a business contract for that length of time without clarifying the work and costs involved. Yet do young people have any idea of the lifetime of work they are taking on when they repeat their marriage vows? Often not.

Perhaps it would help to know that there are roughly six phases of marriage. Each one requires husband and wife to work together as a team, combining their unique temperaments and strengths. As with any team activity, they must pull in the same direction if they expect to complete all six phases with their marriage intact.

Of course, not every couple or family follows the pattern outlined below. But what matters is not that a family adhere to a certain timetable, but that it recognize that there are seasons of family life, and that building relationships is a lifelong process. The following six periods are by no means distinct categories, but overlap quite a bit.

I. The Honeymoon Years

During this first period of marriage, two people from different family experiences and value systems begin to discover one another. Differences and similarities surface in areas such as finances, sexuality, faith, use of time, and personal habits. Each difference affords an opportunity for conflict and,

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hopefully, growth. Patterns that the couple establishes during this phase will tend to affect what happens during the next five phases.

The honeymoon typically ends with the birth or adoption of the first child. For some, it ends with the realization that there will be no children. In all too many cases, it ends with the dissolution of the marriage itself.

II. The Childbearing Years

The birth or adoption of the first child brings a rapid transition. New babies, though welcome, can feel like an “invasion,” an abrupt intrusion into what up until then had been a relatively cozy twosome. Often the father particularly feels displaced as mother and infant bond through birth, nursing, and nurturing.

The childbearing years can be extraordinarily draining. Young parents often give out more than they take in from their children. They may be able to offset the deficit somewhat by revisiting some of the practices that they so valued during the “courtship” and “honeymoon” phases of their relationship. They’ll need to “deposit” lots of emotional support into each other’s “reserve bank accounts” if they hope to maintain a positive balance during the demanding child-focused years.

This period typically ends when the last child begins school.

III. The Child-Rearing Years

As a couple’s children pass through elementary and high school, new authority figures emerge, such as teachers, television personalities, scout masters, coaches, music teachers, youth pastors, and perhaps most influential of all, peers, both friends and bullies. Before, parents had the final word. Now others suggest or impose new values, decisions, and schedules.

That makes child rearing a great time for parents to help children think about themselves and the world. Discussion, prayer, and support can create an atmosphere of unity that is essential if young people are to face the many factors that compete with the family. If the parents are secure in their “bond of perfection,” they can help their children tackle the tough issues—issues they themselves have been dealing with all along.

During the child-rearing years, which may stretch out over two decades or more, parents need to keep making deposits in their mate’s bank of emotional support. One way to do that is to keep dating and to guard time alone with each other. Again, too many marriages never make it through the stresses and strains of the childbearing and child-rearing phases, and the families break apart.

IV. The Child-Launching Years

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With the onset of puberty, children begin to notice the opposite sex and discover “love” outside the home. This is the beginning of the “leaving” process, as children become adults in their own right and take steps toward independence, usually through work, college, and/or marriage.

In this phase, young adults tend to experience numerous “trial runs” of freedom, not all of which succeed. It helps for parents to remain available when their children have lost their way. Failure, whether in academic studies, financial matters, experiments in “freedom,” or sexuality, offer important moments for learning, and sometimes for forgiveness. If young people never experience the freedom to fail, they may never learn to leave the nest and fly on their own.

V. The Empty-Nest Years

They’re gone! Now it’s just two again. Now the couple will find out whether they’ve grown together or apart over the years. Unfortunately, by this point many couples have developed a child or career-centered marriage rather than a strong relationship between themselves. Though understandable, that can be tragic since the empty-nest phase typically outlasts the first four phases combined. No wonder so many marriages come apart as soon as the children have grown up and left. The couples have built their lives around their kids, and now they have nothing left in common.

By contrast, though, empty-nest couples who have built into each other can experience a joyous recovery of full attention to their marriage. They have more time to spend with each other, and often more money to spend. They may also have the bright privilege of welcoming grandchildren into the world.

VI. The Alone Years

The death of either spouse brings the survivor into the final phase of family life. For so many years, the person has lived in relation to his or her mate and children. Now, the sudden experience of being alone again exposes the level of individual growth experienced during marriage. Some couples never establish patterns that make for strong individuality. They become so intertwined and dependent on each other that the loss of the partner causes the surviving mate to crash or wither. But if the person has cultivated other relationships among friends and family and developed personal interests and hobbies, life can still be somewhat joyful, despite the painful loss of one’s lifetime partner.

Where is your family among these six phases of family life? God calls couples to a lifetime of work. Are you practicing “biblical family planning” with a view toward the long haul? ♦

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A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MARRIAGE

CONSIDER THIS 5:21–29

In a great many pagan marriages of the first century, the husband was much older than his wife. He frequented other partners for sex, taking on a wife only to father legitimate children. Thus a girl of 13 or 14 entered an arranged marriage, frequently against her will and often with a man she had never previously met. There was little communication, cooperation, or affection—or expectation of these.

But new life in Christ called for new patterns in marriage (Eph. 5:21–29). Paul instructed the husband to love his wife and seek her personal development—a radically new idea in that culture. The wife was to respond with commitment and loyalty. Her submission was not subordination but a wholehearted response to her husband's love.

New life in Christ also called for "A New View of Sexuality" at 1 Cor. 7:3–6. For additional help on marriage and family life, see the articles listed under "Family" in the Themes to Study index in the back matter.

A Promotion

A CLOSER LOOK 6:5–9 *What Paul wrote to "bondservants" (Eph. 6:5) redefined their occupational status. They were no longer just Roman slaves—they were employees of Jesus Christ! See "Who's the Boss?" at Col. 3:22–24.*

WORK—A PLATFORM FOR EVANGELISM?

CONSIDER THIS 6:5–9 Our jobs put us in touch with people like no other activity. For 40 or more hours a week we toil, laugh, struggle, and interact with others to accomplish tasks. For that reason, many Christians view their workplace as a primary platform for spreading the gospel. Is that legitimate?

It is certainly legitimate to treat our workplace as an opportunity for unbelievers to see Christianity by looking at us. Indeed, Paul challenges us to display a godly workstyle for that reason (Titus 2:9–10). However, we must never emphasize verbal witness to the detriment of our work, as if God sends us into the work world only to use it as a platform for evangelism.

Employers rightly look down on workers who are intruders, deceivers, or sluggards. In Eph. 6:5–9, Paul challenges us to work with "sincerity of heart" and to pay close attention to the work itself, which he calls "doing the will of God." That's what impresses one's employer, as well as God.

What is God's intention for everyday work? See "People at Work" at Heb. 2:7.

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Some employers have become so disappointed with the work of believers that they no longer hire Christians. See 1 Tim. 6:1–2.

CONSIDER THIS 6:10–13

WHO IS THE ENEMY?

No matter who we are or what we do for a living, all of us are bound to face struggles in life. Financial pressures, job loss, personality conflicts, time demands, injury, illness, emotional pain, death—as Job’s friend Eliphaz wryly noted, “Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7).

When faced with setbacks like these, people often tend to blame God for their circumstances, or other people, or even themselves. However, Scripture urges us to consider another, more sinister source for troubles, what Paul called the “principalities” and “powers” in the heavenly places. Our struggle is not against God or other people but against “spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Eph. 6:11–12).

Certainly there’s a place for human responsibility. But Paul is telling us that ultimately, people are not our enemy, sin and Satan are. If we intend to stand up to the onslaught of these powerful adversaries, we must fight them on their own turf—the spiritual—with weapons appropriate to the conflict (6:14–18).

Of course, it can be very difficult to persuade people of that in this day and age. Secular thinking dismisses all talk of the supernatural realm as so much superstition left over from the ancient world. At the same time, advocates of the occult have stimulated people’s curiosity and have developed in many a fascination with evil rather than a determination to overcome it.

Nevertheless, the Bible is straightforward. It declares that evil forces exist in the spiritual realm that have a substantial influence on the world and human events. Paul called them “principalities.” The word is often used in the New Testament, sometimes, as here, referring to fallen angels (Rom. 8:38; Col. 2:15), sometimes to human rulers (Titus 3:1; translated “authorities” in the NKJV), or sometimes to any type of ruler other than God Himself (Eph. 1:21; Col. 2:10).

Sometimes the presence of evil powers is evident, as in demon possession (see Luke 11:14). However, Satan and his hosts have numerous other ways to influence human activity and carry out their ultimate purpose, the capture of people away from God. For example, two means through which they can work are:

Belief systems. Philosophies and worldviews have a powerful effect on the way people live. By introducing lies into the very principles upon which entire societies are based, the evil one can wreak incredible havoc on the world.

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Consider, for instance, the beliefs that fueled Nazism. Eventually they led to the most destructive war in history, which claimed tens of millions of lives. They brought about extermination camps in which millions of Jews and others were slaughtered. They disrupted entire nations and economies. Indeed, the aftermath of that dark era is still with us.

Again, none of this is to suggest that humans are excused from responsibility. But behind the visible, knowable element of human choice, one can detect or at least suspect the activity of forces with supernatural ability and evil intent, prompting people to accept and act on falsehoods.

That's why we cannot be too careful about the ideas we embrace, whether they come from religious teachers, educators, government leaders, or the media. Ideas have consequences, both in individual lives and entire nations. Our best protection against deception is a grounding in biblical truth (Eph. 6:14).

Human institutions and leaders. Human systems and people in authority make ideal targets of Satanic activity because of their influence on others. In the first century, one has only to consider the character and especially the spiritual choices of such groups as the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13–15, 31–36), the Jewish council (Acts 7:51–60), the Herods (see Acts 12:1–2), Caiaphas (see Matt. 26:3), Pilate (John 18:37–38; 19:10–11; 1 Cor. 2:8), and the Caesars, especially Nero (see Acts 25:12), to appreciate the counterattack that Satan must have launched after the coming of Christ and the founding of the church.

Scripture asserts that human authorities are established by God to carry out good purposes (Rom. 13:1–7). But because they are operated by humans, they are vulnerable to the influence of evil spiritual forces.

Paul knew that all too well. As he wrote the Ephesians, he sat chained to a Roman soldier for no other crime than the preaching of the gospel (Eph. 6:19–20). On another occasion, he instructed Timothy, the pastor at Ephesus, to have the people pray “for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1–4).

There are many other ways in which the powers of darkness attempt to subvert the purposes of God. But it is pointless for us to try to determine at any moment whether something is being “caused” by a wicked spiritual power. A preoccupation with that leads only to foolish speculation.

Paul gives us a far more positive, constructive strategy for “standing firm” against our spiritual enemies: “put on the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11). That armor is made up entirely of spiritual weapons: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer (6:14–18). By

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learning to wear and to wield these powerful armaments, we can resist the carefully laid plans of the devil and, when the fight is over, still be standing. ♦¹²

Ephesians 5:3–21

“Walk as Children of Light!”—Transforming Nonconformity

PREVIEW

This section of Ephesians continues the exhortation on “walking properly” begun in 4:1 and taken up in earnest in 4:17. In 5:21 it also introduces the Household Code. The first half of the title is taken from verse 8 and reiterates the familiar emphasis on *walking* in a way that is worthy of the high calling of sons and daughters of God (2:10; 4:1; 5:2). The second half of the title expresses the strong emphasis on nonconformity.

Strikingly, such nonconformity is understood as a matter of turning away from the darkness and also as a means of transforming darkness into light—nonconformity as transformation of the world. This rather surprising twist appears at the point where radical nonconformity would seem to require radical separatism (e.g., 5:3, 7, 11). The *children of light* (5:8) are not to share in the deeds of darkness; they are to *expose* them (5:11) and thus to transform them into light (5:13–14).

At the point where this twist is introduced, we encounter a fragment of a baptismal hymn:

Arise, sleeper,
and rise from the dead,
and the Christ will shine on you! (5:14; cf. 2:1)

Those who have been awakened from death are now to *walk as the wise who are filled with the Spirit* (5:15–18). Such Spirit-filled nonconformity finds expression in worship, in mutual instruction, in the praise and thanksgiving of God, and in mutual subordination (5:19–21).

The call to mutual subordination in verse 21 is usually taken to be part of the following section on the Household Code, as it should be (5:21–6:9, notes). However, 5:21 depends grammatically on the command to *be filled with the Spirit* in 5:18. This means that the call to *mutual subordination* is premised upon divine empowerment (cf. 4:1–3, notes). In this context mutual subordination is an essential part of the intoxicating worship that results from being “drunk” with the Spirit of God (5:18) and should thus be treated also as part of this section of text.

Structure of 5:3–21

Sexual sin, uncleanness, greed,
base behavior, silly talk, coarse joking—
all are to be replaced by thanksgiving! (5:3–4)

For know this for certain:

such persons are subject to the wrath of God.
Therefore do not become their co-participants! (5:5–7)

Walk as children of light
in all goodness and righteousness and truth!
Do not co-participate in the fruitless works of darkness,

¹² [Word in life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Eph 5:1–6:13). (1996). Thomas Nelson.

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much rather expose [them]! (5:8–11)

All things that are exposed by the light are revealed,
for everything that is revealed is light.

So,

Arise, sleeper,

and rise from the dead,

and the Christ will shine on you! (5:12–14)

Walk as the wise,

exploiting the time!

Do not be drunk with wine,

rather be filled with the Spirit,

- singing,
- giving thanks,
- being subject to each other! (5:15–21)

OUTLINE

Transforming Nonconformity, 5:3–14

5:3–7, 11

Separation from the Darkness

5:8–10

Walking as the Children of Light

5:11–14

Transforming Darkness into Light

Walking as the Wise, 5:15–17

Filled with the Spirit, 5:18–21

5:18

Drunk with Wine Versus Filled with Spirit

5:19–20

Inspired Worship

5:21

Inspired and Empowered for
Servanthood

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Transforming Nonconformity 5:3–14

5:3–7, 11 Separation from the Darkness

We pick up the stream of exhortation from the previous section. *Walking in love as Christ loved us* (5:2) is contrasted now by a list of three vices: *sexual sin (porneia)*, *impurity or uncleanness (akatharsia)*, and *greed (pleonexia)*. The NAB translates the series as *lewd conduct, promiscuousness, and lust*, suggesting that the element tying these three terms together is sexual vice (so also Lincoln: 321–2). The usual translation of *porneia* (behind the word *pornography*) is “fornication,” but it should be taken as referring to a much broader range of sexual misconduct (Best, 1998:475–6).

The three terms are taken from a slightly longer catalog in Colossians 3:5 and may have been adapted to highlight sexual vices. But it also echoes the characterization of how the Gentiles *walk*

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in 4:17–19 (notes). Especially the presence of *greed*, however much fueling sexual misconduct, has much wider meaning, including an economic dimension. At the same time, sexual sin is viewed as a prime characteristic of a life alienated from God’s will (cf. Rom. 1:18–32; Hos. 1–2; Ezek. 22–23). When sex is linked to greed, and the greedy thus become insensitive to persons and their covenants (cf. biblical injunctions against lust and adultery), then sexual license becomes cultic defilement—*impurity*—defilement of the holiness of God’s people who constitute the temple of God (2:21).

This brief catalog of vices is repeated in 5:5 and recast to list sinners rather than sins. They are appropriately identified as *idolaters* (cf. Col. 3:5; Rom. 1:23–25; on the connection between greed, immorality, and idolatry: Wisd. of Sol. 14:12, 22–27; Matt. 6:24//Luke 16:13).

Such vices should *not even be named among you, as is fitting for holy ones* (5:3). NRSV translates this line as *not even be mentioned among you*; NIV has *there must not be even a hint*. These translators read 5:3 in light of the prohibition against vile speech in 5:4. Clearly, the prohibition against obscenity in verse 4 is directed squarely at talk that makes light of sexual sin and abuse, trivializing its importance by making it a matter of entertainment. As in verse 3, such talk is not fitting for the holy. The inappropriateness of such talk becomes all the more clear when we remember that *the holy ones (saints)* can refer equally to members of the church and to heavenly beings (1:1–2, notes; Perkins: 115).

The radical covenanters at Qumran censured such behavior severely (thirty days for someone who “giggles so that his voice is heard,” along with such inappropriate behavior as spitting, exposing oneself, speaking ill of fellow members of the community, or falling asleep at meetings; 1QS 7.16–17).

Naming has, however, already appeared in Ephesians in the great prayer of 3:14–21. God is said to have *named every family on earth and in the heavens*. As the notes on that passage showed, *naming* has to do with both engendering and claiming ownership over those named. By *naming*, God declares paternity. If one allows that to affect the meaning of *naming* in 5:3, then the concern is less with mentioning such sins than with engendering them, with allowing such sins to take on existence in the community of holy ones. Perhaps both senses are present, especially if trivializing talk of sexual sin tends to lower the threshold of acceptability (Best, 1998:476–7; Lincoln: 322; Thurston: 134).

On the other hand, *naming* has quite a different meaning today and has come to have an important place in dealing with sexual abuse. The prohibition of *naming* here clearly does not preclude the naming of sexual sin in the sense of identifying it and exposing it for what it is. Indeed, such naming is entirely consistent with the call to *expose* the works of darkness (TLC). There can be no intended contradiction between 5:11 with its call to *expose*, and 5:12, which suggests that some things are too shameful even to talk about. Obviously, the concern is with *how* and *for what purpose* the church talks about these or any other sins. Does such talk give life and power to sin, or does it expose it, disempower it, and transform darkness into light (5:13–14)?

Verse 4 should be understood in this light. *Obscenity and silly talk or vulgar joking* have no place among those whose task is to expose sexual license and all other forms of greed. Instead, the speech of believers is to be marked by *thanksgiving (eucharistia)*. *Thanksgiving (eucharistia)* is to replace *vulgar joking (eutrapelia)*; in broader Hellenistic culture, the term could mean

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“wittiness”; Lincoln: 323). This clearly recalls 4:29, where *bestowing of grace* is to replace *rotten speech*. The importance given to speech in this passage, as in chapter 4, reflects the understanding that words do matter; they express character and disposition, and they also give life to both good and evil (cf. Mat. 15:16–20; James 3:10–12).

Thanksgiving (eucharistia)—in effect, worship (5:4; cf. 5:20)—is to replace destructive sexual behavior and talk. This does not imply estrangement from sexuality itself. The presence of the Household Code later in this chapter shows that this author is a friend of family and having children, and of patterning the relationship of Christ to the church after a model of marital relations (5:23–32). Walking the path of holiness, however narrow, is to be marked by celebrative sounds of thanksgiving.

Grave warnings accompany the catalog of vices. Verse 5 states emphatically (*Know this for sure!*) that those who practice these vices *will have no inheritance in the reign of Christ and of God*. Verse 6 warns readers not to be misled by *empty words*, possibly another reference to ribald speech (cf. 5:4), but more likely to false reassurances that such behavior has no serious consequences. Readers are to know that the *wrath of God* falls on *the sons [and daughters] of disobedience* (cf. 2:2; 4:17–19; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:21).

The unique and puzzling reference in 5:5 to a “double kingdom”—*the kingdom or reign of Christ and of God*—merits closer consideration. On one hand, the reference to Christ *and* God may be no more than a heaping up of synonyms, as often happens in Ephesians. On the other, it may be derived from the double emphasis on God and Christ in 5:1–2 (Perkins: 117). It is also possible that the wording here betrays familiarity with 1 Corinthians 15:24–28: Christ’s reign or kingdom is marked by battle against the powers, culminating in the defeat of death. When that reign is accomplished, Christ hands the kingdom over to God.

In the notes on Ephesians 1:20–22, we suggested that the author may be directly dependent on 1 Corinthians 15 for the combination of Psalms 110:1 and 8:6. Such dependency may extend to the present text. The author may have in mind a two-stage notion of the kingdom: first, the *present* reign of Christ, marked by both reconciliation and defeat of the rebellious principalities and powers (1:20–23; 6:10–18); second, the *future* kingdom of God (the anticipated inheritance; cf. 1:14). All this is at best only hinted at in this cryptic phrase (Schnackenburg: 220), but should not be rejected outright (as do Barth: 564–5; Best, 1998:482; Lincoln: 325).

Verses 7 and 11 are radical in their simplicity of calling for nonconformity and nonparticipation in the life of darkness. Two words with the prefix *sun-* (*with*) describe participation with darkness and those who walk in it: *Do not be their co-participants (summetochoi, 5:7); do not co-participate (sunkoinōneite) in fruitless works of darkness (5:11)*. Typical of the style of Ephesians, the prefix is somewhat redundant. But such redundancy gives greater emphasis to participation (cf. positive uses of the prefix *sun-*, “together with,” in 2:5–6, 19, 21–22; 3:6; 4:3, 16; see Schematic Trans.).

Those who do not heed this warning become vulnerable to the *wrath* or judgment of God. Interestingly, in this case the distinction of the kingdoms or reigns of Christ and of God suggests that the author has in mind the future judgment of God, even as the ongoing vigilance and judgment of God also fits the eschatology of Ephesians (Schnackenburg: 221; cf. Best, 1998:485–6).

5:8–10 Walking as the Children of Light

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his writings, Paul is quite concerned to preserve what is sometimes called “eschatological reservation,” realism about life this side of what in Ephesians is called *the day of redemption* (4:30) or here *the kingdom of God* (5:5). In Ephesians this comes to expression in the exhortation to *grow into Christ* (4:13, 16), to *learn Christ* (4:20), or to struggle against *the powers of evil* (6:10–20).

At the same time, no Pauline letter celebrates the *present* effects of conversion, baptism, and the Spirit as freely and enthusiastically as Ephesians does. The *fruit of light* is *now already* to be abundantly real in those who *are* light, and as we are about to see, apparent to those yet sitting in darkness.

The fruit of light is introduced with a familiar three-item catalog in 5:9—*goodness* (*agathōsunē*), *justice* (*dikaïosunē*: *justice*, NAB; *uprightness*, NJB; *righteousness*, NIV, NRSV, REB), and *truth* (*alētheia*). All three virtues are prominent in Ephesians: *justice* and *truth* are constituent elements in the creation of the *new human* in the likeness of God (4:24) and are the first items listed in the divine armor in 6:14. They are thus related to the “nature” of *the new human* and also constitute the way *the new human* acts. No other virtue is as frequently stressed in Ephesians as *truth* (1:13; 4:21, 24, 25; 6:14; Schnackenburg: 224, renders it as “fidelity” and misses this point). At the same time, *goodness* takes on a comprehensive quality, especially in 2:10 where it is explicitly related to *works* (applied in 4:28–29).

These virtues are related to *discerning what is pleasing (euaireton) to the Lord* (5:10). Believers are to *discern* (*dokimazō*: *find out*, NIV, NRSV; *discover*, NJB; *learn to judge*, REB) what gives the Lord pleasure through the practice of goodness, justice, and truth. Though in Pauline writings, *Lord* usually refers to Christ, in this case we should think more generally of God. “Pleasing the Lord” is a common biblical way of referring to the sacrificial worship of God. This is true both in the case of actual sacrifices or offering up a pleasing odor (e.g., Lev. 1–2; Num. 15) and in the metaphor of offering up one’s life and one’s deeds as a proper and pleasing offering and sacrifice to God (e.g., Ps. 51; Heb. 13:16).

Ephesians 5:2 has already mentioned how Christ offered himself up to God as a sacrifice with a *pleasing odor* (5:2, notes; cf. Phil. 4:18). Romans 12:1–2, is particularly relevant where believers are to present themselves as a “living” sacrifice, “pleasing” to God. In Romans 12, such a pleasing sacrifice is nothing other than the transforming practice of nonconformity *and* the means by which to “discern what is good and pleasing [to God] and perfect” (TRYN).

Nonconformity and the practice of *the good, the just, and the true* gives God pleasure (5:9). Their exercise constitutes the worship of the *children of light* (cf. Pss. 50:14; 69:30–31). The call for *thanksgiving* in 5:4 anticipates this characterization of life in the light. We will not be surprised that this section of Ephesians reaches a climax in the call to thanksgiving, praise, and worship in verses 19 and 20.

5:11–14 Transforming Darkness into Light

The contrast between fruitless darkness and productive light needs continually to be sharpened: *Do not co-participate in the fruitless works of darkness*. The word *co-participate* (*sunkoinōneō*), while not unique to Ephesians (cf. Phil. 4:14; Rev. 18:4), certainly fits the author’s love for words with the prefix *sun-* (5:7, notes). Here it means that believers are to have no share in a darkness too awful even to talk about.

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One might expect the community of believers now to turn their back on the darkness and to separate itself, as happened at Qumran and countless times since. Radical nonconformity is often buttressed with hostility toward those who do not meet the standards of righteousness and truth. Ephesians, however, proposes something better for believers than turning their backs on the darkness and those who sit in it and pushing the *works of darkness* out of mind (5:12). Instead, the *children of light* are to *expose (elenchō)* evil works (so NIV and NRSV; *bring them out to the light*, GNB; *show them up for what they are*, NJB, REB; *condemn them*, NAB).

As the various translations show, the Greek word *elenchō* has a range of meaning (Büchsel, 1964). “To condemn” (NAB) clearly fits a community taking a hard and absolute line against the *works of darkness* (as in Wisd. of Sol. 4:20). This passage leaves no doubt that actions, words, and dispositions that grow out of *darkness* are to be condemned (note esp. 5:5–6).

Elenchō has a rich association with several texts already discussed in relation to 4:25 (notes; “Anger and Speaking Truth,” TBC for 4:17–5:2). In Leviticus 19:17–18, to “reprove” (NRSV; *elenchō* in LXX) is an expression of covenant obligation to love the neighbor. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus calls on his followers to *expose (elenchō)* the sin of the brother and sister—a generous if often conflictual act of love meant to bring repentance and restoration (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24–25).

Ephesians 5:13–14 suggests that such an understanding of *elenchō* is present also in this passage. However, the focus of the exposure is not on the misdeeds of *fellow* members of the community (Best, 1998:492–3; cf. Lincoln: 329–30), but on the goings on among the *sons of disobedience* (Schnackenburg: 226, n. 34). Now the act of neighborly love seen in 4:25 is to be extended to the *sons of disobedience*, whether or not they heed the confrontation or consider it an act of love (on “evangelistic exposing,” see 1 Cor. 14:24–25; John 4:29). Preaching peace to *the far* (2:13, 17) now finds expression in relation to the confrontation with a culture of darkness.

Verse 13 expresses a proverb: *All things that are exposed by the light become visible (or are revealed, or made visible by the light)*. The grammar is ambiguous, but the meaning is clear: *the light* shows up things for what they truly are (so also NJB, REB). Up to this point, the meaning could still be chiefly condemnatory. But verse 14 adds a further maxim: *Everything that is revealed is light*. NIV’s translation, *for it is light that makes everything visible*, does not capture the surprising twist. In this instance, exposing the works of darkness is not primarily directed at the works of darkness still present among fellow Christians (as in 4:25). Here it is participation in God’s comprehensive project of reclaiming creation and those who inhabit it, including the *sons of disobedience* who sit in *darkness* (cf. 1:10; 2:4; Perkins: 119). To expose is to transform.

This explains the otherwise baffling presence in verse 14 of a hymn fragment (Best, 1998:497–8; Lincoln: 331), likely at home in the baptismal celebration of coming to life with Christ (cf. Rom. 6:1–11; Eph. 2:4–6; Schnackenburg: 228–30). This “three-line baptismal chant” (R. Martin, 1991:63) must have enjoyed wide currency in Pauline circles and have achieved something approaching canonical status. This status is shown by the fact that it is introduced with a formula otherwise reserved for quoting Scripture (cf. 4:8; James 4:6).

Therefore it says:

Arise, sleeper,
and rise from the dead,
and the Christ will shine on you! (5:14)

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This hymn or chant contains a number of important items. First, since it typically would have been sung by those attending the baptism of new believers, it in effect becomes an evangelistic wake-up call, echoing Christ's preaching of peace to *the far and the near* in 2:13, 17. It also reminds believers that they are themselves the beneficiaries of Christ's gracious and transforming illumination. With this disposition of gratitude, they are to direct the light into the darkness.

Although the hymn celebrates Christ as the one who shines on the sleeping dead, Jewish readers will surely have heard echoes of the great blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 and, more specifically, of Isaiah 60:1–4. In that instance, the faithful are summoned to arise and shine, reflecting the glory of the Lord. Moreover, the peoples who sit in darkness shall be drawn to this great light emanating from the people of God. In Ephesians, "Christ" includes those who have become part of Christ's body. Not surprisingly, those who were once drawn to the light of Christ have themselves become identified as light (5:8). They are light *in the Lord*. As such, they participate as members of Christ's body, as members of *the new human*, in shining the light into the eyes of those sleeping in the darkness (cf. Matt. 5:14, 16; earlier, Isa. 42:6–7).

Separation and difference have given way to reconciliation, restoration, resurrection, and re-creation ("Light" and creation, TBC). Stated differently, separation and differentiation have as their fundamental motivation the *gathering up of all things in Christ* (1:10). That, in the mind of the author, is impossible if the distinction between light and darkness is not maintained.

Walking as the Wise 5:15–17

Verses 15–21 are structured around three contrasts:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Do not</i> walk as the unwise, | <i>rather</i> as the wise. |
| <i>Do not</i> be fools, | <i>rather</i> know the will of God. |
| <i>Do not</i> be drunk with wine, | <i>rather</i> be filled with the Spirit. |

The first two contrasts place the wise over against fools. This comparison can be found frequently in the Bible, especially in prophetic and wisdom literature (e.g., Wisdom and Folly, personified as two women in Prov. 7–8; 4:11–19 links contrasts of wisdom/foolishness and light/darkness as in Eph. 5:15–17). After the text reminds the children of light of who they are, it exhorts them to *watch very carefully how [they] walk* (for *walking* as a metaphor for living, cf. 2:1–10; 4:17–5:2).

It is important to keep in mind the connection between Wisdom and Christ (TBC for 1:3–14 [*Wisdom*]). Sages are those who have *learned Christ* (4:20) and who have come to *understand* the *mystery* of God (1:9–10, 17–18; 3:8–9). They also have been entrusted with the grand task of making the *multivaried wisdom of God* known (3:10). They can *discern what pleases God* (5:10) and what is *God's will* (5:17; in Rom. 12:1–2, the will of God and what pleases God are virtually equivalent). *The wise* are friends of God and intimates of Wisdom herself (Wisd. of Sol. 7:26–30) or, as in Ephesians, members of Christ's body, participants with and through him in *the new human* (chap. 2). To be addressed as *the wise* in 5:15 presupposes that believers are fully implicated in the task of Christ, *God's multivaried wisdom* (3:10).

The wise are asked to *watch carefully* how they *walk*. One might initially interpret this in light of the vulnerability of the children of light to stray from the way of goodness, justice, and truth

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(5:9). It is more likely, however, that *watching carefully* should be understood in relation to 5:16—*exploiting the moment to the full, because the days are evil*. The meaning of that line is not immediately clear, however.

The Greek behind *exploit* (*exagorazō*) means “to buy” or “redeem” something; in its middle form (as here) it can also mean “to buy off” or “pay off” someone. If interpreted in the latter sense, the wise “pay off” wrath (alluded to with the phrase *the evil days*) and thus “redeem the time” (*BAGD*: 271), much the way Christ “redeems” those under the curse of the law in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5. Time is thus “saved” from wrath (Barth, 1974:578; Best, 1998:505; Lincoln: 341).

A less fanciful and more common interpretation understands the word *exagorazō* in a “commercial” sense of “snapping up all chances at a bargain that are available” (R. Martin, 1991:66; so also at Col. 4:5). Applied to time, it means “gobbling up every available opportunity” (E. Martin: 200; cf. Büchsel, 1964a: 128; Schnackenburg: 235). Time is not neutral, but it is laden with opportunities to be seized—hence the term *kairos* (“opportune time”) rather than *chronos* (time as “duration”). To *watch carefully how one walks* is thus to “purchase” every opportunity to expose the darkness (5:11) and thus to participate in the redemption of time, the transformation of darkness into light (5:13–14).

What lends urgency to this call? Interpreted in light of Paul’s typical apocalyptic eschatology, time is to be exploited because it is short. The *evil days* are the time of intensifying crisis before the day of judgment and redemption (cf. the *evil day* in 6:13). Similarly, Romans 13:11–14 exhorts that since the day of salvation is nearer than ever, believers are to “take off the works of darkness” (TRYN; cf. Eph. 4:22; 5:11), “put on the weapons of light” (TRYN; cf. Eph. 6:10, 14–18), and say no to drunkenness and sleep (cf. Eph. 5:14, 18; 1 Thess. 5:2–8). In short, the *wise* had better know that they are living in the last days and that there is no time to waste. Whatever time there is must be used to get ready for the day of redemption.

Ephesians does not, however, easily fit into an apocalyptic framework (Best, 1998:503–4). In 2:5–7, for example, the author celebrates as *already* true what is more often only anticipated in other Pauline writings—believers have ***already been raised with Christ and seated with him in the heavenlies***. Further, the reference in 2:7 to the *coming ages* appears to allow for a protracted future during which the grace of God is to be shown forth (2:7, notes). While Ephesians does retain a sense of a *future* reckoning and time of salvation (1:14; 4:30), as in the present section (5:5), there is no *explicit* anticipation of the return of Christ in Ephesians.

Instead, in Ephesians the present is loaded to an unparalleled degree with both blessing and struggle. *All* time is “loaded” (*kairos*), however much of it remains until that day of redemption. Many days are *evil* and with them comes the challenge of exposing the evil to the light. The urgency of the exhortation is related to time. But it is related just as much or more to the identity of the church. To walk as *fools* is to miss grasping that the *present* time is loaded, even if the present age is not being wrapped up tomorrow (contrasting with 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11; cf. Elias). To be *fools* is also to undervalue the nature and task of the church as a community of *sages* who as *light* are to seize every moment (*kairos*) to transform darkness into light (cf. Matt. 5:14).

To be *wise* is to *know the will of the Lord* (5:17). Here *Lord* is not restricted to Christ (contra Best, 1998:506; Lincoln: 343), even if it includes Christ. The phrase has both a large and a specific meaning. On one hand, it refers to knowing the height, depth, width, and length of the mystery of the will of God as revealed in Christ, which is to *gather up all things in Christ* (cf. 1:9–10; cf.

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3:18–21). This entails an appreciation for God’s gracious intentions for the disobedient (2:1–10), specifically for Gentiles (2:11–22; chap. 3). It also means understanding what kind of behavior God expects from the community that constitutes God’s home. It means *imitating God* and *Christ* (4:32–5:2). It means *learning Christ* and the *truth in Jesus* (4:20–21). All this can be summarized as discerning what gives God pleasure (cf. 5:10).

Filled with the Spirit 5:18–21

5:18 Drunk with Wine Versus Filled with Spirit

Verse 18 introduces the third of the contrasts, this time being *filled with wine* versus being *filled with the Spirit*. To a modern reader, the focus appears to shift abruptly from wisdom and insight to sobriety. This impression is aided by the fact that the injunction *Be not drunk with wine!* appears to be a direct quotation of Proverbs 23:31, where it is a part of an extended description of the effects of over-consumption of wine (23:29–35). Yet the difference between Ephesians 5:18 and the previous contrasts may not be so great after all. In Proverbs 20:1, drunkenness is contrasted to wisdom, much as is foolishness. We should be prepared for the fact that this is more than “clearly spelled out” and “easily understood” ethical instruction on immoderate drinking (contra R. Martin, 1991:63–4; Schnackenburg: 236), even if warnings against over-consumption of alcohol are fitting, now as then (Best, 1998:507, citing literature).

Drunkenness is a metaphor for life in the darkness (TBC). Here it serves to describe the inebriated walk of the foolish sons of disobedience in 5:3–5 or of the ignorant Gentiles in 4:17–19. Early readers also might have heard in this an allusion to the uninhibited intoxication that characterized many pagan religious observances; this aspect aids its suitability as a metaphor (specific references to worship appear immediately following, in 5:19–20). The injunction not to be drunk with wine is likely not motivated by any particular problems with alcohol consumption (as in 1 Cor. 11:21) or inappropriate worship, but both would have been familiar to the readers. Instead, being drunk is associated with the “walk” of *fools*.

Sometimes a direct connection to Proverbs 23:31 is contested, on the grounds that the injunction against getting drunk with wine had already become widespread in Jewish moral teaching and made its way into Ephesians that way (cf. Lincoln: 340). Testament of Judah 14, for example, contains an identical injunction against getting drunk with wine, connecting Judah’s sin against his daughter-in-law Tamar (cf. Gen. 38:12–26) with the destructive effects of intoxication.

There is good reason, however, to think that Proverbs 23 is being used, in particular in its Greek form. Proverbs 23:31 (LXX) uses the *not ... but rather (mē ... alla)* formula, just as we see in Ephesians 5:18. Further, sounding much like Ephesians 5:19–22, the Greek text of Proverbs 23:31 (LXX) carries an alternative to drunkenness: *Do not be drunk with wine, but converse (homileō, the verb form of “homily”) with righteous persons*. In Ephesians, the alternative to being drunk with wine is to be filled with and by the Spirit, which then finds expression in *speaking to each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.

The center of the exhortation is the summons to be *filled in [with and by the] Spirit [“In”]*. Here again we see the pattern observed in 4:25–32, where a negative injunction is followed by a more important positive exhortation. The alternative to being *drunk with wine* is not simply sobriety, but being *filled with the Spirit*. It is correct not to over-read this as “don’t be drunk with wine, but do be drunk with the Spirit” (so also Fee, 1987:720–1); yet one should not miss the parallel, either. The two have more than once been mistaken for each other (cf. Acts 2:14–21!).

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In Ephesians, being *filled with the Spirit* is not focused on ecstatic manifestations of the Spirit, as is the case in 1 Corinthians 14. But we will miss the energy and enthusiasm that is to pervade the corporate experience of the church if we allow no spillover from the image of intoxication (“sober inebriation,” Schnackenburg: 236–7). Keeping in mind that these words are directed to sages, Sirach (Ecclus.) 1:16 comes to mind: “To fear the Lord is fullness of wisdom; she inebriates mortals with her fruits.”

The Spirit enjoys considerable prominence in Ephesians, referring to the nearness of God’s renewing and sustaining power in the lives of believers (a few relevant instances: 1:13; 2:18, 22; 3:16; 4:3–4, 30). As in 3:19, which our present text echoes, believers are to open themselves to the *fullness of God* by being *filled with the Spirit*. Remarkably, whereas *being filled* is a passive imperative, it is nonetheless an imperative. This command leaves no doubt that *the wise* have considerable responsibility for the degree to which they are able to discern what pleases God, what God’s will is, and what it means to walk in the light (cf. Gal. 5:16).

Even so, believers need the energizing presence of God to exercise that responsibility. Ultimately, it is the gracious *Spirit* of God who empowers the wise children of light in their walk (notes on 1:15–23; 2:1–10; 3:14–21; esp. on 1:17; 2:8; 3:16, 19, 20).

To be sure, it is the community *together* that is *filled with the Spirit*. Being filled with and by the Spirit is not an individualistic experience. Instead, it enables the body of *the new human* to breathe the very breath of God (cf. Paul’s discussion in 1 Cor. 12 and 14, where the gifts of the Spirit have as their sole purpose the enlivening and coordination of the body of Christ, “for the common good” [12:7]). Importantly, *grieving* the Holy Spirit also takes place in the corporate life of believers (4:30, notes).

5:19–20 Inspired Worship

Verses 19 to 21 are grammatically dependent on the imperative, *Be filled with the Spirit* (5:18). Here the author elaborates what it means to be so filled, using a series of participles: *speaking* (or *addressing*), *singing*, “*psalming*,” *giving thanks*, and *being subordinate*. The function of these participles is open to considerable interpretation. Many versions translate them as further imperatives (e.g., GNB, NAB, NIV, REB). That obscures the grammatical dependency on the main imperative to *be filled with and by the Spirit*, leaving the impression of a series of disconnected exhortations. NRSV is most faithful to the grammar with *as you sing ..., singing ..., giving thanks....* Only on the last participle does NRSV reintroduce the imperative: *Be subordinate ...!*

But what is the relationship between the participles (*singing, giving*) and the main imperative (*be filled*)? Do they describe the attendant circumstances or *effects* of being filled, as the NRSV has it? *Be filled ... as you sing*, etc. Or might the participles indicate the *means* by which believers are filled with the Spirit? *Be filled ... by singing*, and so on. This suggests that the corporate life of worship and mutual relations is the context in which it is possible to grieve the Spirit (4:30), and it is also the context in which the filling with the Spirit takes place. Even more important, believers participate in “filling each other up” with the Spirit. Such an understanding is entirely in keeping with the strong emphasis on building each other up in the process of growth into the Christ who is *the new human* (cf. 4:3, 12–16).

An interpreter should always be respectful of grammatical ambiguity. Nevertheless, taking the participles in an instrumental sense shows the most sensitivity to the author’s profound

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respect for the status and responsibility of the church as the community of the *wise*, as the body of *the new human*.

The first participle, *speaking (laleō)*, illustrates this point. The choice of the verb *speaking* may seem peculiar, since it appears that with *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* the readers are to “speak” to each other. It is not clear whether this is a heaping up of synonyms, a common stylistic feature of this letter, or whether it represents an inventory of various kinds of hymnody in the early Pauline churches: psalms known from the Scriptures, hymns to Christ (see 5:19b), and inspired songs born in the moment (Fee, 1987:650, 653–4, calls them “Spirit songs”; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26). What is clearly in the picture is the corporate musical experience of the gathered church. NRSV thus translates the Greek verb *laleō* as *singing*.

However, *laleō* bears great weight in the Pauline writings. With few exceptions it refers to communicating profound truth, often divine revelation. Paul frequently uses *laleō* in relation to his apostolic witness (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:6–7; 2 Cor. 2:17; 12:19; 13:3; 1 Thess. 2:2, 4). It is also the verb of choice when referring to the communication of divine truth in the congregation. Especially in 1 Corinthians 14, *speaking (laleō)* is referred to in a way that builds up the church, whether through tongues or prophecy (cf. most immediately, Eph. 4:25!). It is thus a fitting alternative to the parallel in Colossians 3:16, which has *teach and admonish*. So the call to *be filled with the Spirit* finds realization in sages *speaking* (in this rich Pauline sense) *to each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.

With the possible exception of *spiritual songs* (Fee, as above), there is thus little hint in this passage of ecstatic inspired speech, such as tongues or prophecy. There is recognition, rather, of the instructive, corrective, and motivational power of the church’s hymnody. Such *singing* is then a way of addressing *one another*, of *speaking truth to each other* (cf. 4:25; 2:11–22, TLC), of having a *good word* that communicates grace to those in need of grace (4:29) and, as in the present text, of helping to fill each other with God’s *Spirit*. The brief hymn fragment in 5:14 may be such a form of speech (cf. the use of christological hymns for exhortative purposes, as in 2:14–16 and Phil. 2:6–11). If *to each other* hints at antiphonal singing (Best, 1998:511), so much the better: form and intention buttress each other.

The most immediate audience for the church’s hymns is the community of believers, and the second is *the Lord: singing and psalming with or from your heart to the Lord*. *Singing and psalming*, virtual synonyms, create the sense of worshipful music-making. *Heart* does not refer to silent inner singing, but singing from the very depth of one’s being, where Christ has taken up residence (cf. 1:18; 3:17). *Lord* would have been heard by Jewish worshipers as a reference to God, but in Pauline churches, *Lord* was also the preeminent way to refer to Christ.

The presence of several christological hymns in the Pauline letters suggests that what is in view here are hymns to Christ as Lord (cf. e.g., Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20; 1 Tim. 3:16; most immediately, Eph. 2:14–16!). Beyond that, we recall John 1 and the numerous hymns to Christ in Revelation. As we see, the confession of faith in Christ as *Lord* is often expressed in music and worship. Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that such acclamation of Jesus as Lord can only be the result of the Spirit’s presence fits the present context well.

Verse 20 slightly shifts the audience of worship again, this time to *the God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to whom *thanksgiving* is to be offered *always for everything*. The term *thanksgiving* appeared in 5:4 as the alternative to useless and base talk. Here it is evidence

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of being filled with the Spirit as well as the means for such filling. As in the case of 5:19, it appears that Colossians 3:16 has also had an influence on 5:20.

Despite the allusions to wine, it is highly unlikely that *thanksgiving* is here a reference to a particular part of a worship service, let alone to communion itself (*giving thanks, eucharisteō*, related to *eucharistia, thanksgiving* = eucharist; so also Best, 1998:515; Schnackenburg:239). Worship is in view, true, but as a worshipful stance of gratitude generally, expressed in any number of ways. While *giving thanks* has deep roots in the psalms of Israel, here it describes the disposition of those who have been blessed (1:3–14), graced (cf. 2:5, 8; 4:32), and filled with the God’s Spirit (cf. 3:14–21).

Thanks is to be given *always for everything*, echoing the words of Philippians 4:4–7. This is somewhat of a rhetorical exaggeration. The author does not have in mind the experiences—individual and corporate—for which thanksgiving becomes blasphemy. The wisdom tradition of Israel knew the inscrutable nature of suffering and how deeply wrong it is to force dishonest gratitude on the suffering (see Job). At the same time, this rhetorical flourish is witness to the depth of the experience of grace and love, often mysteriously in the most painful circumstances. It is intended to evoke a life in which gratitude to God informs *every* facet of life, including the struggles of family (5:22–6:9) or the battle against the forces of darkness (6:10–20). All of life is to be marked by grateful worship (1:3–14, TLC).

Such *thanksgiving* is offered *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Thus it gives witness to where and how that grace has been encountered (see all of chap. 2).

5:21 *Inspired and Empowered for Servanthood*

Translators typically begin a new paragraph with verse 21 (NAB is a rare exception). They see the call to subordination as introducing a new topic, the Household Code (next section). The participle *being subordinate (hupotassomenoi)* is read as a new imperative (*Be subordinate!*) rather than as the last in the chain of participles elaborating on what it means to be filled with the Spirit (so also Schnackenburg: 231–2, 244).

It will be important to consider 5:21 as an integral part of the next section, dealing with the Household Code. The Code is grammatically attached to it (5:21–6:9, notes). At the same time, 5:21 must also be read by itself as elaborating what it means to be filled with the Spirit (so also Best, 1998:515–6; Perkins: 125). We should thus consider 5:21 as “transitional” (Lincoln: 338, 365), related *both* to the exhortation to be filled with the Spirit *and* to the Household Code. Here we will consider it in light of the injunction to be filled with the Spirit, and in the next section in relation to the Household Code.

Much is at stake in how the verb *hupotassō* is understood and translated. Literally, the word means “to order under.” Sometimes it can mean “to subject” as in “to vanquish” (e.g., Eph. 1:22; 1 Cor. 15:27–28). The passive is “to be subject” or “to be subjected.” In the middle form, likely here, it means “to place *oneself* under the other” (Delling, 1972; BAGD: 847). In Hellenistic culture, such servility would generally not have been seen as a virtue. The feature of mutuality saves this call to *subordination* from idealizing servility and self-denigration and from locking in place a rigid hierarchy of power and status. Such *subordination* is envisioned as a corporate experience: *Place yourselves under each other (allēlois, mutually; cf. esp. Rom. 12:10; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3–4)*. So its usage here is consistent with the central emphasis in Pauline writings on a disposition of putting others first, of seeking their welfare above one’s own.

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There is an inherent irony in being subordinate *to each other*. If everyone is a slave of the other, then everyone is also a master. It is this irony that the choice of vocabulary exploits. In Philippians 2:3–4, Paul specifically calls on the saints in humility to put others before themselves. He goes on to quote the famous Christ hymn (Phil. 2:6–11) to root such deference in Christ’s own disposition of voluntary slavery in relation to both God and the human community. Such is the intended meaning here in Ephesians. In imitation of Christ, believers are to take on the position of subordinates *to each other* (cf. 5:2). This is in contrast to understandings of subordination in which everyone “knows their place” and humbly and stoically accepts it (cf. 1 Clem. 37.1–38.2; 1QS 2.19–25).

Christ’s servitude was nothing less than a radical expression of his sovereignty. His lordship found expression in his servanthood. It is as such a lord that he is to be imitated by his followers (5:25–31, notes). In them, such “servitude” becomes the expression of the sovereignty of the sons and daughters of God, of those who have been raised and exalted with Christ (2:5–6). Hence, it is important for us to see the grammatical dependency of this phrase on being *filled with the Spirit*. Mutual subordination requires full endowment with the power of God (so also Best, 1998:518).

The servant-Lord who is to be emulated by the believers is also a Christ to be *feared*. Believers are to subordinate themselves to each other *in fear of Christ* (*en phobō Christou*), a phrase unique in the NT. It finds its closest parallel in 6:5–9. Christ is a self-sacrificing reconciler (2:11–22) and also an exacting and demanding master and judge (cf. 5:5; cf. Barth, 1974:521; Best, 1998:518, rejects the suggestion of a hint of judgment here).

Modern translators understandably shy away from *fear* as a motivator for mutual relations in the church community. They are also reluctant to depict Christ in this way, given how differently he is depicted elsewhere in this letter (cf. 5:2, 25–27). Usually *phobos* is translated as *reverence* (as in NIV, NRSV, NJB, TEV). However it is translated, the phrase is roughly parallel to “the fear of the Lord” (or the less-common “fear of God”) found frequently in the Bible (a few manuscripts offer these variants here; KJV). In these texts, *fear* often means reverence, awe, respect, and even gratitude (e.g., Pss. 25:12, 14; 34:4–11).

The shock effect of *phobos* should not be entirely eliminated, however (so Barth, 1974:608, 662–8; Lincoln: 366). *Fear of Christ* should be heard as more than reverence or respect. It should also be taken as a reminder of the awe and fear accorded the divine judge. The *fear of Christ* might be intended to carry such a mix of awe and gratitude, as well as a recognition of the obligation to live in keeping with the will of Christ, as *slaves of Christ* (6:6). Such an understanding of *fear of Christ* is not in tension with being *filled with the Spirit* (TBC).

Many of these issues will be taken up again in the next section. Here it is enough but also crucial to relate mutual subordination and the fear of Christ to being filled with the Spirit.

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Light and Darkness

In the Bible *light* is identified with God. God is the source of light as at creation (Gen. 1:3; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). Moreover, *God is light* (cf. James 1:17; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:23), whose face shines upon those who do God’s will (Num. 6:24–26; Ps. 89:15; and perhaps most dramatically Isa. 60:1–4). This adds to the sense of surprise when we read in Ephesians that believers are themselves *light* (5:11–14, notes). They are so, however, only *in the Lord* (5:8). Their relation to the light of God is

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therefore that of being the offspring, the *children of light*—a phrase that echoes “sons of light” in 1 Thessalonians 5:5 (cf. John 12:36). James also depicts God as “Father of lights” (1:17).

Nevertheless, those who now are *light* were *once* actually *darkness* (5:8). The term *darkness* is deeply resonant in biblical literature. It represents the chaos out of which God creates the light (Gen. 1:2–4; cf. Job 12:22). It also serves to depict death, the cessation of life (e.g., Job 10:20–22; 38:17). Frequently *darkness* denotes sin, rebellion, and oppression (e.g., Job 24:13–17; Ps. 44:19; Isa. 59:9). Its overtones of chaos, death, and alienation suggest God’s fearsome wrath and judgment (e.g., Isa. 47:5; Jer. 13:16; Ezek. 32:8; Joel 2:2, 31; Amos 5:20; Zeph. 1:15).

Not surprisingly, such a stark contrast can lead to a dualistic view of human life and of the human community. Some view this passage in light of a material dualism as found in Gnosticism (e.g., Russell: 96–7). But conceptualizing humanity and its practices in this manner has stronger affinities with the radical sectarianism of Qumran, at the Dead Sea. In the view of those covenanters, humanity is made up of two camps, those with a “spirit of deceit” who “walk in darkness,” and those with a “spirit of truth” who “walk in light” as “sons of justice” (1QS 3.17–4.1).

The hostility of Qumran to those deemed to live in darkness is expressed in the title of their famous scroll *The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (1QM). The piety of Qumran, or one like it, may have influenced this section of Ephesians in particular (so also Perkins: 117). It may also have influenced 2 Corinthians 6:14–15: “What fellowship is there between light and darkness? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?”

In the Gospel of John, *light* and *darkness* function as mutually exclusive realms, which nevertheless interpenetrate. Thus in John 1 the “light” (Christ) enters the “darkness,” which can neither absorb it nor overcome it (1:4–9). While the light enlightens every person (1:9; 8:12), only those who believe become “children of light” (12:36). They “do the truth” and act “in God”; therefore they seek the “light” (3:21). For both John and Ephesians, the transition point of persons moving from darkness to light is “believing” (e.g., John 1:12–13; Eph. 2:8). Ephesians moves further than John, though, in tying the experience of enlightenment to the experience of baptism and thus to entry into a corporate *new human* (5:14, notes).

Fear

The difficulty in translating the term rendered literally as *fear* (*phobos*) is illustrated by a survey of several biblical instances. The stylistic device of parallelism in Hebrew poetry works in the beatitude of Psalm 112:1 to treat “fear” and “delight” as synonyms: “Happy is the one who *fears* the Lord, who *delights* in God’s commandments.” There are no overtones of terror in such an understanding. The “fear of the Lord” is thus often related to “wisdom” and “insight” into God’s will (cf. Eph. 5:15–17, notes; e.g. Ps. 111:10; Prov. 2:5–6). Recall Sirach (Eclus.) 1:16, cited above, where fearing the Lord is related to being “inebriated” by the fruit of wisdom (see Eclus./Sirach 1–2). In particular, fidelity to the law is virtually synonymous with “fearing the Lord” (Balz: 9.201–8; 212–7).

In short, there are uses of the phrase “fear of the Lord” that are not so much laced with threat as they are with a deep sense of gratitude and at the same time a profound sense of awe. This is awe at both the transcendence and the “awe-full” nearness of God, whose name YHWH was rendered in the Greek OT (LXX) as “Lord (*kurios*)” out of precisely such “fear.”

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At the same time, the Bible frequently characterizes God as fearsome in his response to sin and disobedience (cf., e.g., Deut. 6:13–19; Isa. 2:10, 19–21; and many other texts relating “fear of the Lord” to judgment). God is not to be mocked or provoked, and God’s grace is not to be presumed upon; this conviction is essential to the NT generally, finding expression in Ephesians 5:5–6 (cf. 4:25–26, notes). Notice, for example, that in 2 Corinthians 5:10–11 the “fear of the Lord” is related to “the judgment seat of Christ” (cf. also 1 Thess. 5:2–3; 2 Thess. 1:5–10). It is this conviction that underlies the surprising twist of grace in 2:4 (notes). God’s generosity and resourcefulness at reconciliation are not blind to evil and sin.

While God embraces the world with grace, he will not tolerate evil at home. In Romans 6:1–2, Paul asks rhetorically, “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” Believers are to remove themselves from the scene of wrath by no longer participating in that way of living (cf. 1 Thess. 5:4–5). One should be careful not to rule out such overtones in Ephesians 5:21.

Drunkenness as Alienation from God

Along with ignorance, sleep, and death, drunkenness is a common biblical characterization of life apart from God. *Drunkenness* is particularly well suited to depict those who live this way, not conscious of their true state of affairs. Through *debauchery* (Eph. 5:18, *dissipation*, NJB; cf. 4:19), they have drunk themselves into a moral and spiritual stupor.

A particularly striking example is Amos 6:3–6. This text combines many notes found in our text: the people deliberately turn their minds from “the evil day” (Amos 6:3; cf. Eph. 5:16); they sleep on beds of ivory (6:4; cf. Eph. 5:14); they sing idle songs, imitating David (6:5; cf. in contrast *psalming* in Eph 5:19); and they drink wine from bowls (6:6). In Isaiah 28, Judah’s drunken leaders are like “the drunks of Ephraim” (28:1, 3); they have lost all ability to understand God’s will (28:7–13). In Pauline writings, the connection between sleep and drunkenness and alienation from God is seen clearly in Romans 13:13 and 1 Thessalonians 5:7.

Destructive and Constructive Speech

The concern with both the beneficial and destructive effects of speech in Ephesians 5:4, 11–14, 19–20 finds an echo in James 3, which identifies the tongue as a powerful agent of destruction and grace. In Ephesians, as in James, words have power to shape reality—for good or ill (cf. Eph. 4:29). Words are thus *actions* that can communicate grace to those inside and outside the church. Words can bring destruction on both speaker and hearer alike (5:5–6). This accounts for the weight given in the notes on *naming* (cf. 3:14; 5:3, 11–12).

Hymnody

The presence of hymnody in this passage, both by example (5:14) and as a focus of exhortation (5:19–20), is a vivid reminder of an important feature in the piety of the early churches. Ephesians and other writings of the NT frequently quote the Psalms, thus indicating the practice among Jewish Jesus-believers of singing psalms. Such a practice would thereby have entered into the worship life of Gentile believers as well.

Ephesians 5:14 and 5:19b also speak of the rich tradition of hymns to Christ. Hymns are the cradle of Christology. We might think here of the hymns found in the Psalter or in Isaiah, for example, as the raw materials of Christology (e.g., Pss. 8; 110; Isa. 9; 11). Beyond Ephesians 2:14–16 and 5:14, and perhaps 1:3–14 and 1:19–23, we note John 1; Philipians 2:6–11; Colossians 1:15–20; and the many hymns in John’s Revelation (e.g., chap. 5).

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Hymnody serves *both* as a means of giving praise to God, to laud the glory and significance of Jesus as the Christ, *and* as a means of ethical exhortation. The last point is particularly relevant here. For example, Paul quotes one of the greatest of christological hymns, Philippians 2:6–11, to undergird his exhortation for radical, humble mutuality. Hymns are thus a repository of vision and guidance, a vision appropriated and honed in the act of worship. They are also, as this passage reminds us, a means by which believers receive the fullness of the Spirit.

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

This passage has many points of contact with issues faced by churches in the nonconformist stream of Christian tradition. A number of them have been explored at 2:1–10; 2:11–22; and 4:17–5:2.

The Nerve to Be Different

Perhaps the biggest challenge posed by this passage has to do with the nerve to be different. *Nonconformity to the world* (2:12) or *this age* (1:21) was a test of fidelity to Christ in the early church and has been since for many church traditions, especially for those who are heir to the Radical Reformation. Nonconformity's greatest vulnerability is rigidity and self-righteousness. Once nonconformity has become set into patterns of differentness, it is often nurtured and safeguarded by ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural factors at least as much as by commitments to faithfulness. It has also often led to estrangement from the human family as a whole and thus to ignorance about "them" and "what they do."

In much of the church, however, nonconformity is increasingly a quaint relic of the past. Rural folk have moved to the city, and once ethnically and culturally distinct people have found a home in the broad mainstream of society. The harsh dualism of Ephesians—*light* and *darkness*, *children of light* and *sons of disobedience*—no longer strikes many Christians as true to their experience. Such dualism is increasingly identified as arrogant, dishonest, and finally self-deluding (Russell: 97, with a critique of dualism). "Embracing" texts such as Ephesians 1:10; 2:11–22; and 3:14 (notes) are more palatable.

As our study has shown, Ephesians is uncompromising with respect to nonconformity but places it strategically in the context of transformation. Ephesians sees nonconformity largely as part of the overall strategy of God to *gather up all things in Christ* (1:10). Heirs of the radical tradition of being church need to ask themselves whether greater friendship with "the world" is true friendliness toward those who live in it. To blunt the distinction of light and darkness softens the sometimes harsh glare of the light but does those sitting in darkness no favor. It breaks solidarity with them as fellow human beings. It no longer speaks truth to them about the true nature of darkness; it no longer "exposes" the works of darkness (5:11). More important, it also neglects to speak the truth about the gospel of transformation.

The absence of light means drowsiness and finally sleep also for those who are called to be light. They forget that *the days are evil* (5:16). Accommodation to "the world" is a betrayal of the vision of transformative nonconformity. So also is the closed, self-satisfied, and ethnically reinforced separatism to which elements in the believers church tradition have succumbed and to which others have justly reacted. Both miss the *hopeful* difference we see in Jesus, which Paul and his students were so concerned to instill in the church as his body.

Sex and Greed

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In its morally numbing preoccupation with sex, Western culture is not particularly different from the first century. The present text shows great sensitivity to the seriousness of sexual preoccupation in word and deed (5:3, 5). Sexual license is an issue in and of itself, and in 5:2–21 it also is part of greed more generally. The church can help to develop new taboos against abuse and disrespect of persons in the area of sexual relations (TLC for 4:17–5:2). But the church needs to be equally sensitive to abuse and disrespect generated by all forms of greed, particularly when the (financial) market increasingly functions as the source of value and values.

At the same time, the church's disposition toward sex and all of God's material gifts needs to be shaped by gratitude and thanksgiving, by worship. Here too, the separatism and nonconformity of the church needs to be motivated by the desire not to flee the scene but to transform it into the creation that God once called and wishes again to call "*good*."

Culture Wars at Worship Time

When in our music God is glorified,
and adoration leaves no room for pride,
it is as though the whole creation cried
Alleluia! (*HWB*, 44)

Hymnody represents one of the central elements of worship. In many congregations, it has also become a source of the most intense conflicts. Music-making in the church has become a battleground for the clash of cultures. It is a clash between innovation and tradition, between music as evangelistic tool versus music as preserver of identity, between inherited treasure and inspired utterance, and between the extremes of elitism and the banalities of ephemeral popularity (Dawn, 1995:165–204, with excellent discussion).

Our text is a reminder that music-making is one of the church's most important acts (5:19–20). It is inextricably related to being filled with the Spirit. On one hand, it is the effect of having received from God the gift of the Spirit. On the other, it becomes communication directed outward from the singer(s). As such, it has three audiences: one is fellow believers or the congregation (5:19); the second is Christ (5:19); and the third is God the Father (5:20).

It is right to sing *to each other*. In this context, hymnody becomes a way of *speaking truth to the neighbor* (cf. 4:15, 25; 5:19, *laleō*, *speak*). This also means that the church's music must address brothers and sisters in a way that speaks to them and engages their experience. Communication thus becomes a crucial measure of appropriateness. This will *necessarily* result in a great variety of styles of music, which the church does well to anticipate and even celebrate.

An eighteenth-century hymn by Graf von Zinzendorf is a fitting example of hymnody as mutual encouragement and worshipful peacemaking amid the tensions of a culturally diverse community of faith. It is called *Heart with Loving Heart United*:

May we all so love each other and all selfish claims deny,
so that each one for the other will not hesitate to die.
Even so our Lord has loved us, for our lives he gave his life.
Still he grieves and still he suffers, for our selfishness and strife.
(*HWB*, 420, stanza 2)

Concerns at the heart of Ephesians come to forceful expression in the final stanza. It expresses the plea that God might give the church "love's compassion so that everyone may see / in our fellowship the promise of a *new humanity*" (italics added).

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The second audience for the church's song is Christ. Hymnody is one of the most important means by which the church reminds itself of who its Lord is, what it means for him to have given himself for the church (5:2), and what he calls members of his body to be and do in the world. Hymnody is one way to *learn Christ* (4:20), from birth, to ministry, to death, to resurrection, and finally to exaltation and lordship. Of the countless hymns that are sung to Christ, John Oxenham's "In Christ There Is No East or West" captures the essence of worship as envisioned by the author of Ephesians:

In Christ there is no East or West, in him no South or North,
but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.
In him shall true hearts ev'rywhere their high communion find.
His service is the golden cord close binding humankind.

(*HWB*, 306, stanzas 1–2)

Finally, just as Psalm 22:3 speaks of God as "enthroned on the praises of Israel," so the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, furnishes a home for God (2:21–22) with its ceaselessly performed hymnody of thanksgiving.

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices,
who, from our mothers' arms, has bless'd us on our way
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today. (*HWB*, 86, stanza 1)

In this way the capacity to express praise, awe, respect, and love becomes a further measure of the appropriateness of hymnody. Clashes over style and aesthetics will always accompany the hymnic worship of the church (Dawn, as above). This is so because "we are all self-appointed experts in the field of liturgical and corporate praise" (R. Martin, 1991:64). More important, there will be serious tensions and conflicts *especially if the church is faithful*, if it is successful in breaking down walls of division and widening the circle of the family (TLC for 2:11–22).

In many churches, music has become one of the prime contexts for strife and thus for peacemaking. It is thus particularly fitting for Ephesians to have the call for *mutual subordination* follow right after the exhortation to sing hymns. Such central churchly tasks as giving Spirit-filled guidance to each other, on one hand, and "enthroning" God, on the other, cannot be allowed to fall prey to matters of taste, disrespect, and intransigence that tend to characterize all sides in the culture wars around worship.

Mutual Subordination

The issue of *subordination* in Ephesians 5:21 is as important as it is contentious for contemporary believers. It is enough here to note that *mutual subordination* is a manifestation of empowerment with and by the Spirit of God. This is one realm in which the church's redemptive difference should show itself most dramatically. It is also one realm in which the church's difference is waning in favor of different notions of power and sovereignty.

Do believers in the radical stream of the church understand *subordination* as wisdom born of the Spirit? Or do they see it as folly? Do they see subordination as light or as darkness? Do they see *mutual* subordination as the shape of sovereignty for those who have learned the truth that is in Jesus?

One must ask these questions sensitively since there are many in the church, especially women, who have not experienced subordination as mutual, nor as voluntary, least of all as an

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expression of *their own* empowerment. For many, subordination equals subjection—of women to men, poor to rich, black to white, uneducated to educated, laity to clergy, employee to supervisor. To appeal to the *fear of Christ* (5:21) is then viewed as only reinforcing such one-sided servitude (TLC for 5:21–6:9). This text is restoring, renewing, and empowering *only if all* in the church see *others* as greater than *themselves*. Only then will *all* experience themselves as beloved children of light, as Spirit-filled sages and singers.

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

The Household Code

PREVIEW

The Household Code in Ephesians looms large in the church’s struggle for faithfulness in the relationship between women and men in home and church. “Household Code” roughly translates Luther’s German *Haustafel* (table of house-rules), still the preferred label in more technical discussions (e.g., Best, 1998:519–21; cf. J. H. Yoder, 1994:162). Some prefer “Domestic Code” (E. Martin: 181) or “station codes” (Schroeder, 1976:546; R. Martin, 1991:73). Regardless of the label, our text is part of a larger tradition of formalized instructions for the household (TBC).

At the outset, notice several features of this text: First, the family in the Household Code includes the extended family and those who are economically related to that social unit—more the family business than just the nuclear family (Thurston: 138–9). In addition, given the emphasis on church as home and family in the earlier parts of Ephesians (e.g., 2:19–22; 3:14; 4:6, 16), these instructions should be read as applying by implication to the church family as a whole.

Second, comparison with 1 Peter shows that the instructions in Ephesians are directed more heavily to those in dominant social positions (slaves are a notable exception; TBC). This is important for appreciating the particular twist our author places on the tradition.

Third, Christ is both model and Lord throughout this passage. Does this tend to undergird hierarchical structures of authority in home and society, or to soften them, or even to undo them? Readers may want to read the TBC to familiarize themselves with the tradition of the Household Code and better appreciate the specific ways Ephesians takes up the tradition.

Structure of the Household Code (5:21–6:9)

Be filled with the spirit ... (5:18)

by being subordinate to each other in fear of Christ. (5:21)

WIVES to their own husbands as to the Lord,

because a husband is head of the wife

as Christ is head of the church,

and Savior of the body.

As the church is subordinate to Christ,

so also the wives to their husbands. (5:22–24)

HUSBANDS, love the wives

as Christ loved the church

and gave himself up for her

in order to render her holy,

in order to present the church to himself glorious,

in order that she might be holy and blameless.

So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies

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subordination; Schematic Trans.). The call to subordination in 5:21, furthermore, is in direct continuity with what it means to *walk as the wise in evil days* (5:15–16). Thus, *mutual subordination* is the walk of the wise, a manner of life rooted in God’s wisdom, empowered by the Spirit, and enlivened by worship.

Mutual subordination is nothing less than charismatic activity. Therefore, even though the Household Code is a tradition that predates Ephesians (TBC), it expands on one aspect of what it means to *be filled with the Spirit*, specifically, to *be subordinate to one another*. Verses 18 and 21 are the twin lenses through which readers of Ephesians are invited to view the familiar tradition of the Household Code.

Wives and Husbands 5:22–33

The first relationship addressed in the Household Code is that between wives and husbands: wives are to be *subordinate* to their husbands; husbands are to *love* their wives. Even a quick comparison of the Household Codes in Ephesians and Colossians shows that Ephesians expands considerably on these brief instructions, revealing the author’s vision and special concerns (Chart 2, TBC, comparing this text with Col. 3:18–19).

It is most significant that Ephesians compares the relationship between wife and husband directly to that between church and Christ. The two marriages illuminate each other. They do so to such an extent, in fact, that in 5:32 the author must specify *which* marriage is being talked about. While the immediate concern is clearly to offer guidance to wives and husbands for their relationship to each other, there is the overarching concern to illumine the relationship of the church to “her” Lord and Savior.

5:22–24, 33b Wives

As in Colossians, wives are addressed first. They are to be subordinate *to their own husbands as to the Lord*. As stated above, that command must be inferred from 5: 21 (Structure of 5:21–6:9; Schematic Trans.). While *hypotassō* can imply more negatively “blind obedience, docile servility, and unthinking subservience” (R. Martin, 1991:69), the term means quite literally “to order oneself under” (5:21, notes). I prefer to use this less-interpretive translation and allow the meaning to emerge.

The instructions to wives are brief. Instead of the clause in Colossians, “as is fitting in the Lord,” we find the stronger *as to the Lord*. The phrase echoes the unusual *in fear of Christ* in 5:21 (5:3–21, notes on *fear*). *Fear* (*phobos*, also translated as *respect*), reappears in 5:33b in verb form (*phobeomai*), to identify the proper stance of wife to husband. These two occurrences thus form an *inclusio* (marking a section by repeating a beginning word or phrase at the end).

A wife’s subordination to her husband is to correspond, first, to her own subordination to Christ (5:22) and second, to the church’s subordination to Christ, who *is head of the church, himself Savior of the body* (5:23). The stance of the wife in relation to her husband is thus grounded in the relationship of the church to the church’s Lord and Savior, Christ. That relationship is to illumine the quality of subordination of the wife to her husband.

Marriage is here combined with the image of *body* and *head*. *Body* as a metaphor for church is found earlier in Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16) and is familiar from earlier Pauline letters, notably Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. But to speak of Christ as *head of the body* appears elsewhere only in Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15, and earlier in Colossians 1:18 and 2:19.

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What is the extent or limit of this subordination? On one hand, *in everything* (5:24, NIV, NRSV) sets no limits. On the other, such subordination is qualified by the fact that it is voluntary, as is the church's subordination to "her" Lord. It is qualified, more significantly, by how Christ, and thus the husband, is *head*.

Like *subordination*, *head* can have several meanings ["Head"]. It can imply superior status and authority, and it can mean "origin" (or "source"). As the essay on "Head" indicates, in Ephesians *head* carries the meaning of both authority and source. On one hand, God has made Christ *head over* all powers and every name for or through the church, which is his *body* (1:22, notes; headship is related to status, authority, and victory through reference to both Ps. 8:6 and 110:1). On the other hand, the church as an organism—as a *body*—grows into the *head*, which is at the same time the *source* of its growth (4:15–16; cf. 2:15).

Head thus expresses both the *status* of Christ as Savior and Lord over all (cf. Col. 1:18) and the *purpose* of Christ as *source* and *goal* of the church. The husband's relationship to his wife is thus given enormous significance, even if the husband's role can only emulate the cosmic or churchly headship of Christ very faintly.

Does the introduction of Christ and husbands as *heads* aid *mutuality* of subordination? Or does it render subordination all the more one-sided? The wording of the instructions to wives would appear to fall considerably short of the *mutuality* called for in 5:21. Wives, unlike husbands, are conspicuously *not* asked to love, but rather (in dependency on 5:21) to *subordinate themselves* out of *fear* (reemphasized in 5:33!). At best, the wives' subordination to her husband suggests obedience, deference, respect, and discipleship, but hardly reciprocity, let alone being his peer.

Nothing is gained by obscuring the evident difficulties of this text. There truly is tension in this passage, regardless of one's interpretive stance, and it runs deep. It is not simply a tension between gospel and culture. On one hand, the author's primary concern is for the church to be faithful (*subordinate*) to "her" Lord. When applied to the wife-husband relationship, this suggests unqualified subordination of the wife to the husband. On the other hand, and entirely in keeping with the great Christ hymn in Philippians 2:6–11, nothing signifies a deeper, more unqualified subordination to the Christ presented in Ephesians than offering *mutual* subordination. This means being servants and slaves of *each other* and refusing to lord it over *each other* (notes on 1:15–23; 2:11–22; 3:1–21; 4:1–16; 6:10–20).

Given this last point, we should thus be on the lookout for features with the potential to loosen or even undo a notion of familial relationships based on a chain of command. Let me identify a few. The first one is the weakest, at least as it relates to women in the Household Code as found in Ephesian. It is sometimes pointed out that, in contrast to what one might have expected in a patriarchal list of household duties, wives are addressed first and also directly as moral agents in their own right (e.g., Best, 1998:532; E. Martin: 183, 188; Schroeder 1959:89; J. H. Yoder 1994:171). One should be careful not to overplay this point. Wives *are* directly addressed in Colossians and in 1 Peter, but not clearly so in Ephesians, as the translations indicate (GNB, NIV, NRSV, REB have a direct address; NAB, NJB do not). Indeed, Ephesians has no clear *direct* address to wives (esp. 5:33).

A more important counterweight to patriarchal reinforcement is the grammatical dependency of the instruction to wives on the *mutual subordination* of 5:21, a point consistently

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obscured by translators. If the author of Ephesians has adapted the Code found in Colossians, as most scholars rightly hold, then the summons to *subordination* has been lifted out of the command to women (cf. Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1) and made into the rubric for the whole Code (5:21). Barth makes the most of this: A “wife’s subordination to her husband is commanded *only* within the frame of *mutual* subordination” (1974:610, italics added).

Note, however, that such a “frame” is provided *only* in the Ephesian version of the Household Code; it is *not* characteristic of the Household Code tradition as a whole. *Mutual* (*allēlōn*) is a frequent and crucial term in Pauline exhortation (cf., e.g., Rom. 12:10, 16; 13:8; 14:19; 15:7; 1 Cor. 11:33; 12:25; Phil. 2:2; 1 Thess. 3:12). It is not used lightly here or elsewhere in Ephesians (4:2, 25, 32). Thereby the author has deliberately injected the Pauline emphasis on reciprocity into household arrangements *not* typically characterized by such mutuality and reciprocity. Could this have been done lightly? Could it have passed unnoticed by superiors in domestic relations?

The third aspect that potentially destabilizes the patriarchal order is, ironically, the way the author employs the term *head*. In Ephesians, the two meanings of head as “authority” and “source” converge to the advantage of the church [*“Head”*]. In 5:23, Christ as *head* is identified also as the body’s *Savior*. That is surely a reference to his offering of his life (5:25; cf. 2:13, 16; 5:2) and also to his ongoing “saving” of the church (5:26; cf. 3:16–19). As 1:15–23 shows, the church is the prime beneficiary of the power that raised and exalted Christ—that *gave him to be head for the church (or through the church; 1:15–23, notes)*. This is reinforced in 2:5–6, where those who were *once dead have been raised and seated with Christ in the heavenlies*.

Most explicitly, in 4:15–16 Christ is the *head* into which the *body*—the church—*grows*, and the body receives from Christ what it takes to grow (4:15–16, notes). In Ephesians the church does not so much exist for Christ as Christ exists for the church. The author of Ephesians wants these overtones to be part of the resonance *head* carries in the command to wives and, by implication, to husbands. The nature of Christ’s headship is meant to set the terms within which *subordination* is given content. Headship means lordship, yes, but a lordship that is expressed most fully in liberating and exalting the subordinate one. That is the character of both Christology and ecclesiology in Ephesians.

No doubt the tension in these words to wives results in part from fusing the appeal to Christ with a Household Code tradition reflective of patriarchal assumptions. But as stated earlier, the ambiguity results also from the inherent paradox at the heart of discipleship: being subordinate to and imitating a Lord who is a slave (cf. Phil. 2:6–11). This fragile and unstable mixture prevents any easy inference as to what this text means concretely for the relationship of wives to their husbands. As we shall now see, this unstable chemistry also pervades the words directed to husbands.

5:25–33 Husbands

Husbands are given considerably more attention in Ephesians than in Colossians (esp. Chart 2, TBC; in Colossians, the greatest attention is given to slaves; in 1 Peter, to slaves and wives; Chart 1, TBC). Perhaps in the life setting in Ephesians, the church is more established and thus includes more settled and more complete families (Gnilka: 276; Best, 1997:189–203, and 1998:524–7, considers the Code as found in Ephesians and Colossians to be out of touch with the social realities of a church made up of mixed families of believers and unbelievers). In a patriarchal structure, the father/husband determines the ethos of the family. Addressing that

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role/station should therefore have a ripple effect on the whole family system (J. H. Yoder, 1994:177–8). This accounts for the extent of attention given to husbands.

Be that as it may, it hardly explains the disproportionate amount of space given to slaves in 6:5–9. More likely, the author is using the husband slot in the Code to explore the relationship between Christ and church, as also in the rest of the letter (esp. 1:22–23; 2:11–22; 4:1–16). The exhortation to husbands gives the author opportunity for two things: to provide a model for how husbands are to behave toward their wives as imitators of Christ, *and also* to reflect theologically and worshipfully on the relationship between Christ and the church. The latter objective has a tendency to crowd out the former, leading to the need for a clarifying comment in 5:32.

This section can be divided into two parts. A brief overview might be helpful here. In the first part (5:25–28a), husbands are asked *to love their wives as Christ loved the church* (5:25). This love is described as Christ *giving himself up* for the sake of his bride, the church, to present her to himself *glorious, holy, and unblemished, without spot or wrinkle* (5:26–27). The ambience of romantic love is mixed with that of self-sacrifice. Verse 28a reminds husbands that Christ's love for the church, his body, is the model for the love they are to have for their own wives, their own bodies.

Verse 28 concludes the first part and opens the second (5:28–33) by recalling the image of *the body* (seen earlier in the instructions to wives, 5:23) and by introducing the concept of self-love. Verse 29 follows the appeal to self-love with a proverb-like observation that no one hates his own *flesh*. This is related to Christ's *care and nurture* of his own body, the church (5:30).

Flesh and *body* interact here in unusual fashion. Normally in Pauline letters, *flesh* (*sarx*) opposes *spirit* (*pneuma*; cf. Rom. 8; Gal. 5; also Eph. 2:3, 11). Not so here. The reference to *flesh* may be invited by Ephesians 5:31 quoting Genesis 2:24: *A person will leave father and mother and be joined to his wife. And the two will become one flesh*. This fleshly union and the process leading up to it are described as *a great mystery*, a term loaded in Ephesians with the full agenda of salvation (1:10; 3:3–9; 6:19). The *mystery* is not, however, the unity of husband and wife, but rather God's design for the unity of the cosmos as reflected in the "fleshly" union of Christ and church, as made clear in 5:31–32 (cf. 2:14–15).

After reflecting on Christ and the church, the author returns in 5:33 to husbands, exhorting them to love their wives as they do themselves. At the end of the verse, wives are asked indirectly and tersely to *fear their husbands*. The reintroduction of *fear* (or *respect*; cf. 5:21) signals the conclusion of this section of the Code and forms an *inclusio* (marking a section by repeating a beginning word or phrase at the end).

At first reading, the text appears to have as its chief objective to buttress the superior place of husbands over wives. First, the relationship of husbands to wives is analogous to that of the Lord and the church. In 5:21 believers are to *fear* Christ; in 5:33 wives are to *fear* their husbands. Even if *fear* is not to be understood as "fright" or "terror" (most versions prefer "respect"; 5:21, notes), it does suggest an inferior's awe-full respect for a superior. Second, wives are identified with the husbands' own *flesh* to such an extent that love of wife is love of self, as we see in 5:28b. The patriarchal prerogative of the husband thus appears to be given both christological and psychological legitimation.

But is it? As in the instructions to wives earlier, both the appeal to Christ and the appeal to self-love have the potential to destabilize patriarchal privilege. First, we must pay attention to

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how Christ is to be emulated by his fellow *heads* (husbands). Despite the explicit allusion to the Genesis creation account in 5:31, the husband is *not* invited to lord it over his wife (cf. Gen. 3:16) but to *love* her with the same love with which Christ loved the church. In Genesis 3, the husband lording it over the woman was a divine *curse* pronounced as a response to sin; in Ephesians, the husband's love emulates God's *blessing* of creation in Christ (cf. Eph. 1). The love of the husband is to emulate the love that desires the full re-creation and flowering of creation.

Whereas *fear* frames this passage (5:21, 33), there is, in fact, nothing in Christ's demeanor as described here that is remotely fearsome. Christ *loved* the church *and gave himself up for her*, a phrase that points to his death on the cross—already given prominence in the drama of peace, reconciliation, and new creation in 2:14–16. To imitate that headship may turn out to be truly fearsome, but for husbands, not wives! Here Christ's self-giving love intentionally echoes 5:2, where love and self-sacrifice are set forth as a model for how believers are to worship with their whole life (5:2, notes). This Pauline turn of phrase, *Christ ... gave himself up* (5:25), is loaded with the full freight of Christ's work of salvation (cf. Gal. 2:20). To imitate such a Christ is the imitation of God (5:1) and radically self-giving.

Here such love is specifically demanded of *husbands*. They are to love *as Christ loved*. Their role is that of living and dying for the sake of the *other*, their spouse. A husband's love finds expression in the liberation, not of himself, but of his spouse. If such identification with Christ buttresses the status of the husband, it is, ironically, for the purpose of serving the interests of his spouse. Such love necessarily subordinates *self*-interest to the interests of the *other*.

The term employed for *love* here is *agapē*, a term often set over against the rather “cool” *philia*, friendship love, or the “hot” *eros*, sensual or sexual love. *agapē*, in contrast, is characterized as not selfish or driven by emotion or attraction. These distinctions have been overplayed. *agapē* is too quickly emptied of passion and desire, and understood largely as self-denial, directed wholly to the interests of the other (cf. 1 Cor. 13). To be sure, this *other*-directedness does characterize in large measure the love commended here, as we have just seen. Christ's love *is* deeply self-giving. But the analogy of marriage and the allusion to sexual union is intended to express also the passion and desire at the root of Christ's love for the church. We should thus not miss the element of passionate love in the following imagery of the bridal bath (5:26–27) and the consummation of marriage (5:31; contra Best, 1998:540).

Three purpose clauses in 5:26–27 elaborate on the self-giving of Christ's love (Structure of 5:21–6:9; Schematic Trans.). First, Christ is depicted as washing his bride *in order to make her holy*. The phrase *cleansing her by washing with the water in word* is rich in association. Baptism is the most immediate. *In word*, or *with the word*, is then usually taken to refer to a baptismal formula such as *in the name of Jesus* (Best, 1998:543–4; Gnllka: 281; Houlden: 334; Lincoln: 375; Schnackenburg: 250).

Though it would be difficult to deny some allusion to baptism, in Pauline circles baptism was more commonly connected to participation in Christ's death and resurrection (cf., e.g., Rom. 6). Moreover, though an allusion to baptism would stress past events in the believers' lives, Christ's sanctifying and cleansing love is here envisioned as ongoing. That is the basis for appealing to Christ's love as a model for husbands in their *ongoing* love for their wives. *Washing in word* (5:26) may thus suggest, in addition to baptism, the *ongoing* nurturing and sanctifying effect of the ministry of the word (cf. the emphasis on word-ministries in 4:11).

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Our text also evokes the rich imagery of Ezekiel 16:8–14 (e.g., Barth, 1974:693; Best, 1998:543; Lincoln: 375). YHWH, upon finding young Jerusalem naked and bloodied, bathes her and readies her for marriage. Such an allusion serves in Ephesians to place Christ's act of finding a bride and readying her for marriage in the larger context of salvation, described with quite different imagery in chapter 2. Ephesians 2 describes a liberation of *sons of disobedience* from the clutches of the evil power of the air (2:1–10), and then a great act of peacemaking *in the flesh* and the rebirth of a *new human* (2:11–22). The same event is here depicted as an act of washing and sanctifying a bride.

This image of *washing*, on one hand, depicts Christ as the maid readying the bride for the wedding or, as Best puts it, as the “beautician” (1998:546). On the other hand, Christ is depicted as the lover amorously engaged in the care of his beloved. Neither image is one of domination. Servanthood, desire, and pleasure combine to portray the self-giving and saving love of Christ.

The purpose of Christ's loving activity is to render his spouse *glorious, holy, and without spot or wrinkle* (5:27). We might object that this panders to (male?) fantasies of the perfect consort. However, the central intention is not to reinforce unrealistic and impossible expectations of one's wife, but to recall for readers the infinitely *gracious* work of salvation in and through Christ *on their behalf*. The *holiness* and *blamelessness* of the church is *Christ's* work, however much it engages all of the energies of its members. *Holiness* and *blamelessness* are an essential outcome of Christ's peacemaking (cf. 2:20–22; cf. 2:10; 4:24). So likewise are husbands to make the full and complete humanity of their wives their consuming passion.

This way of characterizing a husband's *love* in effect renders the subordination of the wife to such a husband *mutual subordination*. That is not to claim that such subordination is necessarily understood by the author to be equal in measure to that of wives. Patriarchal assumptions may well have prevented the author from fully drawing such an inference. That should not prevent *us*, however, from observing that the content of the love the husband is called to exercise is hardly distinguishable from the most severe expressions of subordination: washing, caring for, and dying for the sake of others.

But a surprise awaits us, at least at the outset. Up to this point, the central emphasis has been on *love-for-the-other*—Christ's love for the church (5:25–27). The second half of the words to husbands (5:28–33) now introduces *love of self* as the motivation for a man's love for his spouse.

At first sight, this exhortation seems to be appealing to a rather base instinct or to a rather self-evident truism: *no one ever hated his own flesh* (5:29). A closer reading, however, undermines such an understanding. First, Christ is described in 5:29 as *nourishing* (*ektrephō*) and *taking care of* (*thalpō*) the *church* just as a man cares for *his own flesh*. These terms are rare in the NT. *Ektrephō* appears only in Ephesians, here and in 6:4, where it describes the nurture and education of children (6:4, notes; 1 Thess. 2:7 has the related *trophos*, “nurse,” or “nursing mother”). *Thalpō* appears elsewhere only in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, where Paul likens himself to a mother nursing her infants.

In other literature, these two verbs together sometimes stipulate the husband's duties in a marriage contract (Gnilka, 285; Perkins: 134). But here they depict the depth of care and concern the husband is to have for his wife. Such care is measured by the degree of love all have for their own *flesh* and, much more important, by Christ's care for his own *body*, the church.

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Second, Ephesians 5:31 quotes Genesis 2:24 and gives it an important role. Some have even suggested that it is the center around which much of this passage takes shape (e.g., Tanzer: 339). *A man leaves his father and mother and “fuses” (proskollaomai) with his wife—and the two become one flesh.* *Proskollaomai* is variously translated as an active, such as “cling to” (NAB), “cleave to” (NASB), or “unite with” (GNB); and as a passive, such as “be united to” (NIV, REB), “become attached to” (NJB), or “be joined to” (NRSV). It means literally “to glue on” or “to” or “to be fastened to” (Liddell and Scott).

This citation from the creation narrative captures well the ambience of love and desire associated with the union of man and woman, and serves the present context well. Both separation from parents and conjugal union with one’s spouse take on heightened meaning when read through the prism of Christ’s relationship to the church. As 5:32 reminds us, that is the primary point of the citation (so also Miletic: 18–22).

With this playful interweaving of two marriages, Ephesians invites the full engagement of a biblically informed imagination. The Christology in Ephesians is much marked by Israel’s wisdom tradition (notes for 1:3–14; 3:10). One of the Jewish traditions associated with Wisdom is that she left her heavenly home and found a home in Israel (cf. Ecclus./Sirach 24). Viewed in this way, Genesis 2:24 becomes an allusion to Christ’s act of leaving his heavenly home and attaching himself to humanity.

Husbands are invited to reflect on their own relationship with their wives with an imagination thus awakened to their own experience of salvation in Christ. More than an image of sexual and marital union, the phrase *the two become one flesh* now evokes the great hymn of peace in 2:11–22. Through his death on the cross, Christ creates a *new human (anthrōpos)* out of *the two* (2:15) *in or through his flesh* (2:14). In 5:31, *the two* are, of course, Christ and the church, man and woman, not Jews and Gentiles. Even so, the unions of both sets of *twos* are part of the same impulse toward reconciliation, re-creation, and union that constitute the heart of the divine mystery, *to gather up all things in and through Christ* (1:10).

Genesis 2:24 thus retells in a highly concentrated fashion the story of liberation through Christ. At the same time, that liberation is related directly to the recovery of creation, a frequent theme in Ephesians (cf. 2:10; 4:24). At the heart of that liberation lies a passionate love so great that a man leaves his home to become one with his beloved. The love of man and woman in marriage provides the occasion to act out that drama of salvation on the domestic stage.

What gives this line of thought its coherence is the close affinity in this text between *flesh* and *body*, *sarx* and *sōma*. The prime image of the church in Ephesians is the *body* of Christ. As Christ’s *body*, the church carries his *fullness* (1:23). Ironically, such *love of self* becomes a way of speaking of the *effects* of Christ’s *love-of-the-other*. Christ died for the sake of his *own* body (2:15–16). The result of that self-giving love is a *new human (anthrōpos)*, the *body of Christ*, which includes healed humanity—the inclusion of the *other*—and also Christ himself. In 2:15, Christ reaches out to create the *new human in himself*; in 4:7–16, Christ as its head sees to it that the body grows *into himself*.

The reconciliation and union of Christ and the church is of such height, width, length, and depth (3:14–19) that for Christ to love the church is, in effect, to love himself. So *love of self* describes, not the *starting point* of the husband’s engagement with his wife, but, via the analogy

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of Christ, the *consequence* of the *love for the other*—his wife, for whom he left his home and with whom he has become one flesh. The husband will gain his life by losing it.

This difficult and too easily misunderstood notion of *love of self* is informed by a further tradition. Every Jew, including the author of Ephesians, knew that at the heart of the law, and thus at the core of faithfulness to God, lies the double commandment. It is captured well in the Gospels:

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28–31; cf. Matt. 22:35–40; Luke 10:25–28; cf. Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14)

Everyone who has ever loved knows full well that to make the measure of *love for the other* the love one already has *for oneself* is in effect a summons to self-sacrifice. Notice that in Luke the double commandment ushers in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–42; cf. John 15:12–17).

In the OT, *love for self* is not commanded so much as assumed. Love for self is not self-absorption so much as the primal and mostly unconscious need to protect and nurture oneself—to stay alive. To love the neighbor *as oneself* is the glue of social solidarity, of covenant. A community lives or dies by whether members are willing to relinquish their sense of privilege for the sake of the other, and thus for the sake of the community. The heart of the call to love the neighbor *as oneself* in Leviticus 19:18 (cf. 19:34) is *not* an appeal to *self-interest*. Instead, it is a most radical summons to make one’s own already-existing interests the full measure of what one is prepared to seek *for the other*—in effect, to *subordinate* one’s interests to those of the other.

When in Ephesians 5:33 husbands are asked to love their wives *as they do themselves*, such love is informed by realism about instincts of self-preservation and, more important, by the heart of covenant law. Husbands are being prodded by means of law (Lev. 19; Gen. 2) and example (Christ) to make their already deeply embedded sense of privilege the full measure of what they wish and do for their wives.

Imitating Christ in his love for his own body might suggest that wives are absorbed into the identity of their husbands, and that they find their worth solely in the identity of their husbands, however loving those husbands might be. The command in Leviticus 19:18 to love the neighbor, the *other* (cf. also the love for the “alien” in 19:34), reminds the husband that marital love is *covenant love*. In covenant love, the other is *not* absorbed into oneself, but that *one together with the other* constitutes *one flesh* (2:11–22, the reconciled new human *in the flesh* [2:14]).

Almost as an aside, the author returns with an abrupt jolt to the theme of *fear* (5:33b). Even if one translates *phobeomai* as *respect* or *awe*, not *fear*, the symmetry is missing. The verse makes a *direct* address to husbands, that each of them is to *love* his wife, then adds the *indirect* word to the wife, that she is to *fear* her husband. Perhaps the author’s intent here is little more than to bring this section of text to a neat conclusion by means of this *inclusio* (cf. *fear* in 5:21). All the more surprising, then, that mutuality is missing (cf. again 5:21; so also Best, 1998:559–60).

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Does what is asked of husbands in this passage live up to the summons in 5:21 to *be subordinate to each other*? Lincoln suggests love and subordination are “two sides of the same coin” (393; cf. Penner: 135–6, 142). But is the love described in Ephesians an expression of (self-)subordination? The discussion above suggests as much, even as it works *within* the cultural assumptions of male privilege. The import of these words depends, first, on how one views Christ. Second, it depends on whether it is possible for husbands to emulate in their actions and disposition the Christ whose lordship looks like slavery. This last point is crucial. Sarah Tanzer, for example, despairs at the possibility that this text is good news for wives, given the “limits of human behavior” (335). To state her concern differently, this exhortation *would be* liberating for women only if they could marry the Messiah! Tanzer is right. The hope in this text lies in whether in some measure they do marry the Messiah, whether in some significant way their husbands can *learn Christ* (4:20), whose lordship finds its fullest expression in servitude.

In this ambiguous mix, some signals appear to strengthen the foundations of male domination, and other signals have the potential to erode those same foundations. The text invites us to ask: Is it possible that in putting their own *Lord Christ* before *lords* (husbands, fathers, masters), the author of Ephesians is uttering a prophetic word more critical and potentially transformative of patriarchy than he can appreciate? Despite mixed signals, there is a basic direction in the argument: the *mystery* that the author of Ephesians is so eager to divulge is that God’s work *in Christ* is one of liberation, reconciliation, restoration, and unification with each other and with God. The disposition of husbands toward their wives is essentially to mimic *that* work of Christ. They are to participate in the context of marriage in the mystery of *gathering up all things* (1:10).

It is true that in Ephesians this word is directed primarily toward husbands, to those who in a patriarchal context take their own superior station for granted. But it is addressed to them also as those who take their relationship to Christ with utmost seriousness. Their most natural point of identification is with the *head*—in this case, Christ. It becomes critically important, then, to know the Christ who is put before them as a model. Herein lies the trick in this passage: the *head is* given the *servant* as a model. In constructing the argument this way, the author of Ephesians engages in the same subversive activity as the author of that other washing text, where Jesus—*as Lord!*—washes the feet of his disciples (John 13:1–20).

In Ephesians, Christ’s character and role as *head* are that of self-giving liberator, loving groom, and amorous servant. The other *heads* are given nothing else to imitate (cf. 4:32–5:2). This direction of the argument carries the challenge of this text to the first readers and brings its ongoing challenge to married couples today.

Children and Parents 6:1–4

The instructions to children and parents are brief and to the point. Even so, a comparison with Colossians shows that the author leaves his mark also on this brief part of the Household Code (Chart 2, TBC).

6:1–3 Children

Children are addressed directly: *Obey your parents in the Lord*. Many manuscripts do not contain *in the Lord*, and its presence here may be due to the influence of Colossians 3:20 on those copying the text (Chart 2, TBC). Even so, the phrase is consistent with the way the author grounds his exhortations and motivates his readers, especially if *Lord* is allusive both of God and of Christ.

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Many commentators take *in the Lord* to be part of the more original reading (e.g., Barth, 1974:654, n. 194; 755; Lincoln: 395; Schnackenburg: 261. Best, 1998:564, doubts its originality).

Such instruction would have enjoyed wide resonance in Greco-Roman society generally. But its Jewish rootage here is shown by the supporting arguments. First, children should obey their parents *because this is right (eous) or just*. This is surely code for behavior in keeping with God's will as expressed in the law (Schrenk, 1964:188). That is made explicit in the immediately following quotation of the fifth commandment, that children are to *honor father and mother* (close in wording to the LXX of Deut. 5:16 and esp. of Exod. 20:12; Lincoln: 397; Perkins: 137; quoted also in Matt. 15:4; 19:19; Mark 7:10; 10:19; Luke 18:20). *Obedience* is thus one expression of a larger *honoring* of parents. It is true that the law as a dividing wall has been broken down; yet as a guide for those who are *in the Lord*, it is still in force (Eph. 2:14–16, notes on the law).

It is striking that the *promise* for such fidelity to the law is the thoroughly material blessing of *long life on the earth*. At first glance, there is some tension between this “earthly” *promise* and the “heavenly” *inheritance* mentioned earlier in the letter (1:14, 18; 5:5). Some interpreters thus downplay the promise here as little more than a way to give the law gravity (e.g., Schnackenburg: 262). Others reinterpret this promise in light of a spiritual inheritance (e.g., Schlier, 1971:282). However, reckoning with both the open-ended eschatology of this letter (2:7, notes) and the comprehensiveness of its understanding of salvation (1:10, notes), a promise for *long life on the earth* should not surprise us (e.g., Best, 1998:568).

Indeed the author has widened the blessing to include the Gentiles by deleting the phrase “that the Lord your God is giving you,” a reference to the Promised Land (cf. Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). The presence of the Household Code in this letter is itself strong testimony to the attention the author pays to life *on the earth*. In Ephesians, salvation encompasses everyday social dimensions of life, including the most generative one, the family. The obedience expected of children is thus set into the context of *mutual subordination* (5:21) and also of respect for the duration of God's act of *gathering up all things in Christ* (1:10).

Children by itself defines a relationship more than it indicates age. Pheme Perkins cites a Qumran text to support her claim that not young so much as adult children are being asked to obey and care for their aging parents (4Q416, Frag. 2; 3.16–17; Perkins: 137). Though it would be foolish to limit the text's relevance to adult children, the Qumran text draws our attention to the likelihood that the Code here speaks to the relationship of children to their parents generally, regardless of age. The fact that children are being addressed directly is a significant indicator of the importance accorded them as moral agents in their own right; it may be a further indicator of the age spread the author and audience would have assumed (so also Best, 1993:57; 1998:563; Lincoln: 403).

As in the case of *subordination* in the first set (5:21–33), no explicit limit is here placed on *obedience* (6:1). It is, of course, typical of terse commandments to ignore mitigating circumstances. Tragically, such commands are still today used to force obedience to unjust and injurious parental orders and expectations. However, our text does set *implicit* limitations on obedience. First, the called-for obedience is *in the Lord*, meaning that the context of obedience to parents is the believing community (so also Lincoln: 403; Thurston: 142). The second limitation comes through the following words directed to fathers.

6:4 Fathers

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The term *parents (goneis)* is now replaced by *fathers (pateres)*. While *pateres* can include parents of both genders (cf. Heb. 11:23), the explicit shift from the inclusive *goneis* to *pateres* likely reflects the patriarchal nature of family responsibilities. In the cultural context of the time, the *father* was ultimately responsible for the moral and religious education of the children (Best, 1998:563).

The potential for abuse of such authority is immediately signaled by the fact that the first order to fathers is that they not *provoke* their children *to anger*. As terse as this is, the word *provoke* covers all the types of abuse of power committed by people whose culture has given them unquestioned authority. The counsel given here echoes advice given fathers generally in Greco-Roman culture. It presupposes the virtually unlimited legal rights of a father over his children (on first-century parent-child relationships and the potential for, and reality of, abuse, see Lincoln: 398–402, 406).

That this means more than an injunction against irritating children is suggested by the use of the verb form of *provoking to anger (parorgizomai)*; cf. Col. 3:21, “to irritate,” *erethizō*). In 4:26, believers are to be angry, but not to sin. “Not to sin” means addressing the *provocations to anger (parorgismoi)* before the sun sets (4:26, notes). In the present text, fathers are not to give their children reason to be angry. In light of 4:26, we should recognize that the specific choice of vocabulary means also that fathers are to do nothing that would leave *themselves* subject to *God’s wrath*. The fathers are not to force their children into a position of having to deal with their father’s violations or become complicit in their father’s violations of God’s will.

The wording thus hardly suggests an unqualified or unquestioning obedience of children to parents and fathers. This becomes all the more true when “children” are adults. In short, fathers are to behave toward their children as fellow members of a covenant community that is marked by *mutual subordination*, but also by mutual and joint accountability before God—a theme made explicit in the following instructions to slaves and masters.

A comparison of the instructions to fathers with the Colossian precedent shows the hand of the author of Ephesians clearly (Chart 2, TBC). As frequently in Ephesians, a negative prohibition is followed by a much more important and profound positive exhortation (cf. esp. 4:25–32; note structure of argumentation in 2:1–10 and 5:3–14). The alternative to the violation of the parent-child relationship is for fathers to *nurture* their children *in the training and instruction of the Lord*.

Nurturing (ektrophō) marks Christ’s “feeding” (NIV) and “nourishing” (NRSV) of his church in 5:29 (notes). The care and nurture modeled by Christ is to mark the disposition of fathers to their children. While *ektrophō* can mean “rear” or “bring up,” the note of nurture should not be underplayed. In describing his apostolic activity among the Thessalonians, Paul likens himself in the same breath to a nursing mother (*trophos thalpē*, 1 Thess. 2:7; cf. Eph. 5:29) and an exhorting and encouraging father (1 Thess. 2:11). In our present text, the roles of mother and father have been combined in what is expected of fathers.

The author now adds two further terms that overlap with *nurture* in meaning. Fathers are to nurture their children *in the training (paideia)* and *instruction (nouthesia) of the Lord*. Both terms relate to instruction, with *paideia* carrying overtones of discipline (cf. Heb. 12:5–11) and *nouthesia* connotations of warning (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; Bertram, 1967; Lincoln: 407; Schnackenburg: 263). Both reflect the gravity of responsibility a parent carries for the moral and spiritual development of children.

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The absolute use of the title *Lord* brings God into the picture, thus placing training, discipline, and instruction in the context of familiarizing children with the ways of God. *Of the Lord* may thus be a “genitive of quality” (Lincoln: 408), indicating that the instruction and training is “about the Lord.” A Jewish father would have understood that to mean training children in the law. An example of such use of the law is seen in 6:3. On the other hand, in Pauline circles *Lord* also was a favorite way of referring specifically to Christ. The prime responsibility of *fathers* in relation to their children is thus to train them in the way of the Christ, to help them to *learn Christ*, meaning *the truth that is in Jesus* (4:20–21)—kindness, love, and servanthood (2:13–17; 5:2, 25–26). Fathers can only do that effectively by modeling the walk of Jesus themselves.

The genitive might also be a “subjective genitive,” however, in which the instruction is the Lord’s (Bertram, 1967:624; Best, 1998:570). In that case, we might think of God and/or Christ performing their saving mission through the instructions provided by fathers. Both meanings are permitted grammatically, and both fit well the flow of the presentation.

The gravity of responsibility given here to fathers requires that parental responsibility be fully respected. In the first century, Jew and Gentile alike would have assumed that. It is a point less obvious in our day. At the same time, rooting the exercise of authority in the imitation of the servant Lord Jesus again *necessarily* destabilizes hierarchical and abusive power structures in the family. The obedience of children to their parents in verse 1 is here mirrored in the call on fathers in effect “to turn their hearts to their children,” in the words of Zechariah’s hymnic celebration of the coming reign of God (Luke 1:17). Here such “turning” is expected of fathers who are part of the body of the Messiah who has come and who is present in the families of the church, not least in their children.

This section of the Code, as the previous one, is to be read through the lens of *mutual subordination* (5:21; so also Lincoln: 393, 402, 409).

Slaves and Masters 6:5–9

Unlike the pairings of wives and husbands, and children and parents (fathers), slavery is not part of the social reality of most readers of this commentary. Slavery was, however, a familiar and common institution for early readers of Ephesians, and the attention given to slaves both in our text and in other instances of the Code in the NT is witness to the reality of slavery in Pauline congregations (cf. 1 Cor. 7; Philem.).

Slavery was as pervasive and as entrenched an institution when Ephesians was written as are labor-management structures in today’s modern economies. There were voices calling for humane treatment of slaves (e.g., Seneca; Epictetus), and self-interest dictated that for the most part slaves should be treated less brutally than the law permitted. Nevertheless, slaves had no rights, regardless of their education and their importance to their masters (on slavery, see Bartchy: 65–73; Best, 1998:572–4; Lincoln: 415–20).

As in Colossians, considerably more attention is paid in our text to slaves than to masters. This may reflect something of the social makeup of the congregations. It may also reflect something of the social stresses a gospel of freedom in step with Galatians 3:28 might have exercised on the growing churches at the end of the first century (so Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:214–8; J. H. Yoder, 1994:175, 190). This latter point is disputed by those who believe slavery was so entrenched in the culture that it did not occur to people, including slaves, to do away with

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it, no matter how much the slaves yearned for freedom (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21; Balch, 1981:107; Lincoln: 418, but see 358; MacDonald: 112).

In any case, the Code is clear that slave-master relationships are to be brought under the lordship of Christ. Here too we see the vision of the author at work in shaping inherited material.
6:5–8 Slaves

As in Colossians 3:22–24, slaves are addressed first and directly (Chart 2, TBC). As in the case of children, this also reflects the social reality in the church in which they are seen and treated as moral agents in their own right (Lincoln: 419–20, 424; J. H. Yoder, 1994:171–2). Like children, the form their subordination takes is *obedience* (*hupakouō*).

Two sets of comparisons shape the exhortation. One is the analogy between being slaves of *fleshly lords* and being *slaves of Christ*. The other is the contrast between “normal” servitude marked by hypocrisy and a desire to ingratiate oneself, and a servanthood marked by integrity and honesty—the kind of servitude one offers Christ.

The christological motivation present elsewhere in the Household Code is here sharpened. *As to the Lord* (cf. 5:22) or *in the Lord* (6:1) now becomes being *slaves of Christ* (6:6; cf. 1 Cor. 7:22). The obedience offered human masters is in essence faithful service to Christ himself. In a somewhat surprising combination, such service is marked on one hand by *fear and trembling* (cf. 5:21, 33). Even more, on the other hand, it is marked by *integrity of heart* (*haplotēs*), by generosity, a good disposition, even enthusiasm—service with “heart and soul” (6:5–7, evoking the great commandment of Deut. 6:5; Best, 1998:578; Lincoln: 421).

The familiar pattern in Ephesians of following a negative prohibition with a much more important positive exhortation is present here as well (cf. 4:25–32; 6:4). It is most clearly shown in the *not/but rather* pattern in 6:6. Christian slaves are *not* to serve for appearance’s sake, or to be motivated by the need to please their human masters. Such would be the greatest temptation for those whose welfare, even survival, depended on the good will of their masters. Their servitude is *rather* to be one marked by wholehearted service to Christ.

As in 4:28, where thievery is to be replaced by doing *the good* (cf. 2:10!), so here slavery *as to Christ* is *doing the will of God* (6:6), *doing good* (6:8). As indicated in the notes for 2:10 and 4:28, *doing the good* is heavily freighted vocabulary in Ephesians. It places faithful servitude into the context of God’s overall designs for humanity (2:10, notes).

Further, such servitude is placed into the larger context of divine remuneration. God pays close attention to the good that is done and repays it, whether or not *fleshly* masters have paid attention (6:8). Left undefined is whether this refers to an eschatological reckoning or to the ongoing divine vigilance to see that both good and evil are repaid (cf. Rom. 13:3–5). Similar assurances are given to slaves in Colossians 3:24–25, where certainty of eschatological “reward” and “inheritance” is connected with a wisdom saying regarding divine repayment of both good and evil. In 1 Peter, where slaves suffer at the hands of unjust masters, they are reassured of God’s vindication (cf. 2:23) and can look forward to the same fate as that of Christ, who also suffered injustice. Their endurance is placed in the context of imminent judgment and liberation (1 Pet. 4:7).

In contrast to 1 Peter, however, Ephesians assumes that *both slaves and masters* are *within* the church. Nothing is said here about suffering injustice, except in the warning to masters in 6:9

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to desist from threatening their slaves. Instead, slaves are to render their service in light of Christ's lordship, as *mutual subordination* (5:21).

Are limits placed on such service? Being *slaves of Christ* suggests that there are none, as befits service to Christ. On the other hand, this premise inherently sets limits on what can be asked of slaves, especially *within* the body of Christ where *both slaves and masters* ultimately share one *master in heaven*. It may thus be quite deliberate that Ephesians omits the phrase found in Colossians, *in everything (kata panta, Col. 3:22)*. A further qualification on the *obedience* of slaves is implied in the following words to masters.

6:9 Masters

The word to *masters* is brief—at least on the surface. Several distinct features emerge in close comparison with Colossians 4:1 (Chart 2, TBC). The author replaces the call for justice and fairness in Colossians with a specific injunction, *Desist from threatening slaves!* But more important, he first adds a terse yet laden command, *Do the same to them!* The injunction concludes with the assertion found at the end of the words to slaves in Colossians, affirming that with God there is no favoritism, no respect for status. In Colossians, that is a word of reassurance spoken to slaves, that God will judge their masters without respect for their status. Here it warns masters that before God they have no privileges, that they *together with their slaves* are fellow-slaves of Christ.

At first glance, the demand in Colossians 4:1 for fairness and justice appears to be a stronger and richer admonition to masters than that found in Ephesians. However, given the substantial content of the exhortation to slaves in Ephesians, the command to masters to *do the same* is striking and much less respectful of the “special” prerogatives and responsibilities masters might think they have in relation to their inferiors. With the command *Do the same to them*, the author is applying the call to *mutual subordination* (5:21) to a social relationship of structural inequality.

Ephesians 6:9 reminds masters that they share the same Master in heaven. The test of their fidelity to that Master is whether they emulate a faithful slave in their relationships to slaves. In short, masters are to learn to be masters from a slave. As absurd as that might seem, it is consistent with the Christ presented throughout the exhortation (cf. 5:2, 25–26) and in keeping with the heart of Pauline admonition generally (esp. Phil. 2:6–11). Indeed, the clause *Do the same to them* is a functional equivalent to the call for being subordinate *to each other* with which the Household Code began in 5:21 (contra Best, 1998:580), thereby supplying a fitting conclusion.

Though this is hardly a frontal attack on the institution of slavery, the exhortation, if taken seriously, is profoundly destabilizing to relationships of structural inequality. Even apart from the insistence in 6:9 that with God status is of no account, an echo of the vision of unity and equality in Galatians 3:28 may be heard in the phrase at the end of 6:8, *whether slave or free* (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11). The fact that masters are to begin imitating their faithful slaves *immediately*, suggests that at least in the church, slaves should not have to wait for judgment day for the good they do to be rewarded (6:8; so also Lincoln: 424; contra Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:268).

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Origins of the Tradition of the Household Code

Beyond Ephesians 5–6, the tradition of the Household Code is also found in Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Peter 2:13–3:7; and in more highly adapted form in 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; and Titus

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2:1–10; 3:1. Sometimes Romans 13:1–7 is also considered to be part of this tradition (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13–17; Schroeder, 1976:546).

The historical context and origin of this tradition has been a matter of considerable debate and is too complex and involved to receive a full treatment here (e.g., extensive studies of the Household Code: Balch, 1981; 1992; Crouch; J. H. Elliott, 1981; Lührmann; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:251–84; Schrage; J. H. Yoder, 1994; BCBC treatments by E. Martin: 181–95; Waltner: 95–103, 180–3). A few matters should be highlighted, however.

The ancient household or family was organized in a pyramidal structure of authority, with the father at the top, followed by mother, children, then freed-persons (former slaves), and at the bottom the slaves. The actual social expression of this usual model varied from time to time and place to place. Women, for example, were sometimes heads of households, even when not widows (Wordelman: 392). Even so, the prevailing assumptions of the age were patriarchal, in both Jewish and Gentile society. The ordering and proper functioning of these relationships were thus of general concern. We should not be surprised to find letters of the NT addressing these concerns.

Most scholars today believe that the writers of the NT learned the tradition of the Household Code from the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue, but that the roots of the tradition were deep and varied. It owes much to the widespread and stereotypical Hellenistic instruction on household management (*peri oikonomias*, literally meaning “laws or rules of the house”; Lührmann: 85–90). The household, an essential building block of society, was viewed as a microcosm of that larger social whole.

Aristotle’s widely cited comments on household management anticipate the structure of the Household Code in Colossians and Ephesians. In analyzing the component parts of the state, Aristotle proposes that

the investigation of everything should begin with the smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these three relationships. (*Politics* 1.1253b; quoted in Lincoln: 357; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:255)

Recognizing the relationship of the microcosm (family) to the macrocosm (society), we should take what is said about wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters, to set a tone for how people are to comport themselves in church and society generally.

Against majority opinion, David Schroeder, and following him Ernest Martin, Erland Waltner, and John Howard Yoder, have taken a different approach. Though they concede that in many ways the Household Code in the NT reflects broader Hellenistic culture, Jewish and Gentile, there are features that mark it as distinctly Christian. The following are of special importance: First, the described relationships have a reciprocal nature. Second, in each instance the NT texts accord unusual respect to the normally inferior “stations” by addressing them directly and first. Third, the use of the imperative owes more to OT law than to Hellenistic lists of domestic duties. Fourth, there is the distinctive appeal to Christ as motivator and model (Schroeder, 1959; 1976:547; E. Martin: 287; Waltner: 180; J. H. Yoder 1994:178–9, 187).

The first approach tends to devalue the references to Christ and love (*agapē*) as a thin Christianizing veneer over what remains a thoroughly patriarchal tradition and thus “in no sense

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revolutionary” (Best, 1993:85; cf. 1998:583). The second approach, taken by Schroeder and those who have followed his lead, highlights the references to Christ, interpreting the Code in light of the servant Jesus encountered in the Gospels and in hymns like Philippians 2:6–11. Tellingly, John H. Yoder calls his treatment of the Household Code “Revolutionary Subordination” (1994:163–92).

The Household Code in the New Testament

In my view, it is best to allow for multiple sources for this tradition (as Schroeder himself concedes, 1976:547; J. H. Yoder, 1994:189, n. 55). It is especially important to understand that a variety of life settings and theological and pastoral agendas have given varied shape to this tradition, as Charts 1 and 2 show (below). In Chart 1, note especially the differences in sequence, vocabulary, supporting arguments, and expansions. This invites us to pay attention to how and why the tradition is adapted in each case.

Chart 1

Skeleton of Household Code in Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter

Col. 3:18–4:1

Eph. 5:21–6:9

1 Pet. 2:13–3:7

Be subordinate to *every human* institution on account of the Lord. (cf. Rom. 13:1–7) (instruction to slaves here; see below)

... be (ing) mutually subordinate out of fear of Christ,

Wives, be subordinate to your husbands. *wives*, to their own husbands. *Wives*, be subordinate to your own husbands.

(expansion on Christ and husbands as head) (expansion on winning unbelieving husband by imitating the suffering Christ)

Husbands, love your wives. *Husbands*, love your wives as *Husbands*, show Christ loved the church. *Husbands*, show consideration to your wives (major expansion on Christ as weaker, but also as fellow-and church as husband and theirs. wife)

Children, obey your parents. *Children*, obey your parents. (no mention of children- (expansion with appeal to parent pair) Law)

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Fathers, don't provoke your children. *Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger. (expansion on fathers as educators and nurturers)*

Slaves (douloi), obey your human masters (kurioi). *Slaves (douloi), obey your human masters (kurioi) as servants, be subordinate to (expansion on Christ as slaves of Christ. (major ultimate Master) expansion on being slaves of Christ) (major expansion on serving and suffering as Christ suffered)*

Masters, be just; you have a heavenly Master. *Masters, behave like your slaves; you have the same impartial Master in heaven.* (no word to human masters)

Chart 2

Comparison of Household Code in Ephesians and Colossians

(italics in Ephesians mark additions to the Colossian Code)

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

Colossians 3:18–4:1

5:21 ... *be[ing] mutually subordinate in fear of Christ,*

22 **wives**, to their own husbands as to the Lord, 23 *because a husband is head of the church, wife as also is Christ head of the church, himself savior of the body.* 24 *But just as the church is subordinate to Christ, so also the wives to their husbands in everything.*

25 **Husbands**, love the wives, *just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her;* 26 *bitter towards them.*

in order to render her holy, by having cleansed her by the washing with the water in word, 27 in order to present the church to himself glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, in order that she might be holy and blameless. 28 So ought the husbands to love their wives as their own bodies. The one who loves himself loves his own wife. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and takes care of it, just

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as also Christ the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a person will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. And the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery (I am speaking of Christ and the church). 33 Even so, let each one of you love his own wife as himself; but the wife is to fear the husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord,^{3:20} **Children,** obey your parents in for this is right. 2 "*Honor your father and everything, for this is your acceptable duty in mother*"—*which is the first commandment* the Lord. *with a promise—*³ "*so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.*"

4 And **fathers,** do not provoke your children^{3:21} **Fathers,** do not provoke your children, *to anger, but nurture them with the training* or they may lose heart. *and instruction of the Lord.*

5 **Slaves,** obey your human (fleshly) masters^{3:22} **Slaves,** obey your human masters in *with fear and trembling* in integrity of *you* everything, not for the sake of appearance heart as to Christ, 6 not for sake of as "pleasers", but in integrity of heart, appearance as do "pleasers," but *as slaves* offearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work *Christ doing the will of God* from the heart from the heart (soul) as to the Lord and not (soul), 7 offering service *with enthusiasm* as to humans. 24 knowing that from the Lord to the Lord and not to humans, 8 knowing you will receive the reward of inheritance; that *whatever good each one does,* he will you serve (are slaves of) the Lord Christ. For *receive the same again from the Lord,* the one who does evil will be repaid for the *whether slave or free.* evil; there is no favoritism.

9 And **masters,** *do the same to them,*^{4:1} **Masters,** treat your saves justly and *desisting from threat,* knowing that both fairly, for you know that you also have a their and your Master is in heaven, *and with* master in Heaven. *him* there is no favoritism.

Subordination in Various Life Settings

Subordination as Putting Up with Injustice

Why did NT writers employ this tradition? First, it is often suggested that the church needed to place limits on the freedom invited by a gospel in which distinctions between Jews or Greeks, slaves and free, and male and female were no longer significant (cf. Gal. 3:28). As John H. Yoder puts it, "Don't overdo celebrating your liberation!" (1994:190; much earlier, Schroeder,

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1959:151, speaks of those in subordinate stations being in danger of “overinterpreting” the gospel). But why?

Perhaps the call for good order in domestic relations was urged by the needs of evangelism and witness. In a society where a father determined the religious life of those in his charge, the conversion of a socially inferior member of the household, such as wife or slave, could easily be viewed as socially destabilizing insubordination (Russell, 1984:102; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:262–6). Hostility to the church as a socially disruptive liberation movement might imperil the church’s efforts. Rather ironically, believers were asked to rein in their freedom for the sake of the gospel of freedom. The Household Code reassured society and instructed believers that Christians are not a threat to family, economy, or society. Stated more positively, a wife’s *willing* and *chosen* subordination to her (unbelieving and possibly hostile) husband, or believers’ subordination to (hostile) “human institutions,” could be a witness intended to lead to the conversion of spouse and society.

In 1 Peter, the Code appears to fit this setting and purpose well (see esp. 3:1; cf. Titus 2:5, 8; Schertz, 1992a; Schroeder, 1990:48–58; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:260–6; J. H. Yoder, 1994:176, 185; Waltner’s treatment of 1 Peter 2:11–3:12 is appropriately entitled “Christian Witness in Hostile Society”). In such a setting, the chief concern of the Code is *not* adapting to prevailing social mores, but rather the imitation of Christ in difficult and even hostile circumstances. Prevailing social patterns and structures are part of the *problem*, not the solution.

In a hostile society, *subordination* is therefore a form of Christliness in a situation of powerlessness and suffering, in imitation of a Christ who himself put up with a terrible situation—for the sake of its transformation, to be sure! *Subordination* is thus a mode of behavior motivated by the desire to see transformation. But it is also marked by a willingness to suffer injustice in light of the certainty of divine intervention and judgment (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12–19). Evangelism, eschatology, and the imitation of Christ as the righteous One who can count on divine vindication—these all undergird this stance of subordination.

Subordination as a Virtue in a Well-Ordered Society

In a different life setting, *subordination* is a *virtue*. In this case, subordination of those who are in socially inferior positions is not a *tactical* or *strategic retreat* from the radical freedom in Christ for the sake of the larger victory of the gospel—and thereby ironically an expression of such freedom. Nor is it the stance of those who really have little choice other than to suffer injustice. Instead, it is a *positive virtue* in the proper ordering of relationships *in* family and church. Subordination is not putting up with injustice, but undergirding right order.

As the church grew more conservative and more conventional—perhaps especially in circles where suffering was not as immediate a factor as in the case of 1 Peter—eschatological fervor subsided. Instead, institutional and organizational needs took on greater prominence (Gnilka: 276; Lincoln: 390). The church may also have had to take serious issue with those who disparaged family life (R. Martin, 1991:72; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:266–70). In such a life setting, attention has shifted from life at the often-troubled intersection of church and world (as in 1 Peter) to life wholly *within* the church. Interestingly, this conception of order and relationships within the church owes much to ideals present in the surrounding world.

A hierarchical and patriarchal social pattern requires subordination on the part of those in the inferior “stations” of wife, child, and slave. Nevertheless, the appeal to Christ in the NT

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Household Codes implies also a stance of love, care, and respect on the part of the dominant ones (often called “love-patriarchalism”; cf. Koontz: 204–5, “benevolent patriarchy”; Lincoln: 391; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:269–70; Schroeder, 1959:127). No doubt this constituted, then as now, a significant alternative to exploitation and abuse of privilege and dominance. Even so, unlike 1 Peter, this model principally presents Christ, not as a pattern for *subordinates*, but as a pattern for *superordinates*—husbands, fathers, and masters.

Which Context Fits Ephesians?

Two arguments; two perspectives; two colorings of subordination; two appeals to Christ. In one case, Christ is a fellow-*subordinate* (suffering wife and slave), in the other a fellow-*superordinate* (head, husband, master). These frames of reference reflect quite different primary audiences and different strategies. As indicated above, the first option fits the context of 1 Peter well. It should be quite apparent by now that the second alternative is much more reflective of the way the tradition is taken up in Colossians and Ephesians.

As in Colossians, the household envisioned in Ephesians is wholly *within* the church. There is little indication that troubled relations with the outside world occasioned the use of the Code in Ephesians, as it appears to have in the case of 1 Peter. Ernest Best is dubious that the way the Household Code of Ephesians pictures family life in the church reflects actual experience. He considers the assumption of Christian family life with no unbelieving members to be out of touch with first-century church reality, and thus ethically “inadequate” (1997:201) and “pastorally unrealistic” and “defective” (1998:526).

In my view, Best misunderstands the purpose and pastoral function of an ideal model. Even so, he is correct in observing that in Ephesians, as in Colossians, *believing* wives are to be subordinate to *believing* husbands, *believing* children are to be obedient to *believing* fathers, and *believing* slaves to *believing* masters. And all of this is enveloped by a repeated appeal to Christ as model, motivator, and ultimate authority figure—a model chiefly for those in the *superordinate* position, to be sure.

Many interpreters consider these features to show that the author of Ephesians, writing later than the Paul of Galatians 3:28, no longer senses any tension between the subordination of *only* wives and the call to *mutual subordination*. In this reading, *mutual* for Ephesians simply means that everyone in the church and family should be subordinate to their superiors. As Letty Russell puts it, “We are *all subject*, but some are *more subject* than others!” (1984:101, her italics). Ephesians has reverted from Paul’s Christ-centered egalitarianism to the social mores prevailing *outside* the church and has made them normative *within* the church (Johnson: 341).

This retreat from the radicalism of early Pauline teaching is viewed to be in tension also with the relativizing of family associated with Jesus in the Gospels (Mark 3:31–35 and par.; Matt. 10:34–37 and par.; 19:29; but see 15:4–6). In Ephesians, the family (even as conceived of in larger terms than a modern nuclear family) is viewed as part of God’s ongoing blessing of humanity (note, e.g., the use of Law in the instructions to children, in 6:2–3).

Letty Russell calls this a return to “a modified plan of business as usual” (1984:100; cf. Johnson: 340–2; Perkins, 1997:140; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:270; Tanzer: 331). Hierarchical relations are viewed as being given christological legitimation and thus, fatefully, permanence. Some count the Household Code as so much out of step with the generous and embracing vision of Ephesians as a whole that they consider it to be a later and quite regrettable insertion into the

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body of Ephesians (e.g., Tanzer: 340–2; cf. Munro, 1983:27–37). The way this text has been put to use gives considerable weight to these criticisms.

A different reading of the Household Code is possible, however, with respect to both intended purpose and potential effect. First, there is no compelling reason to consider the Household Code as a foreign implant in Ephesians. It appears in exactly the same sequence of themes found in Colossians. Moreover, it is consistent with the gist of the letter as a whole. The household, and marriage especially, is viewed through the lens of Christ's self-giving lordship and the unity of body and head that marks Ephesians as a whole (esp. chap/s. 2; 4; Houlden, 1977:329). Whether or not the Household Code was inserted in the letter at a later date is ultimately irrelevant since it arrives at our homes in the present canonical envelope. As those who read this text canonically, we neither have nor desire the luxury of "solving" by excision the problems this text raises.

Second, the author's depiction of Christ and his role in salvation must be considered part of the context of the Code as we find it in Ephesians. Christ is seldom if ever the focus of attention in Ephesians *apart from* how he benefits the church—to such an extent that the church frequently takes the place of Christ (e.g., notes for 1:23; 3:19). No document in the NT pays greater and more respectful attention to the church than does Ephesians (Introduction).

Many do view the strong presence of Christology in the Household Code in Ephesians as a way to "cement" traditional hierarchical relationships in the family. But the role of Christ as described in the Code is entirely consistent with the way the rest of the letter presents him: Christ is God's self-giving agent to make peace with, exalt, and re-create humanity. It is *that* Christ who is the Lord and who appears in the Household Code as model and motivator.

Christ is not put forward in Ephesians' Household Code as a model for the vulnerable, as a fellow innocent sufferer at the hands of oppression and injustice—what we see in 1 Peter. In Ephesians, Christ is presented as a model for the strong and the dominant. And what are they shown? A passionate lover whose love finds expression most profoundly in a servanthood to the death. The Pauline themes of mutual servanthood and the imitation of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:6–11) inform the way the author adapts the tradition of the Household Code in Ephesians, even if these themes sit cheek to jowl—and with some discomfort, to be sure!—beside the patriarchy that informs the Household Code tradition the author inherits (Hays: 65). One is unfaithful as an interpreter if one lifts this passage out of its setting either, on one hand, to dismiss it, or on the other, to isolate it as a law to be enforced without paying adequate attention to its internal dynamic and its larger context.

The Home as Public Witness

As stated earlier, the instructions for the household speak to relationships *within* the church. This has led to the charge that, unlike 1 Peter 3 or even 1 Corinthians 7, no interest is shown in the Christian life as it intersects with the world; or that many marital and economic relationships carried the burden of brokenness and hostility (e.g., Best, 1993:82–85, 96; 1998:524). However one should not expect of the Household Code in Ephesians what it does not set out to do. The author is not interested in dealing with immediate needs of pastoral care or evangelism so much as in grounding valued familial relationships in the overall project of God to *gather up all things in Christ* (1:10). Hence, Ephesians focuses on Christ and church.

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Thereby, however, familial relationships *do* become public witness—a public that includes *the powers* (3:10; 6:12). The *children of light* are to confront the *works of darkness* in the interests of transforming darkness into light (5:3–15); believers are together to avail themselves of divine power to take on the powers (6:10–20). Just so, familial life is to be a public act of Spirit-filled worship (recall grammatical dependency of the Code on 5:18–21). It is for such a public witness that Ephesians puts forward a vision of family relationships being lived *as to Christ* (6:5).

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

An Embattled Text

Today the Household Code is highly controversial in the life of the church, especially as it relates to relationships between men and women. The Southern Baptist Convention in the United States has recently taken an explicit stand reasserting the importance of the headship of the husband in the home, citing Ephesians 5 as biblical support. Others view this text as a pernicious attack on women, and thus best left out of the operative canon of Christian women.

Between these two poles are those who hold a high view of Scripture but who nevertheless see the text being *misused* as a weapon against women. They recognize that “headship” is misunderstood as authority, and that the cultural context of patriarchy is erroneously taken as normative (e.g., Grenz: 107–17; Scholer: 40–4; Swartley, 1983:256–69 [“Head”]).

Experience, individually and socially, and the “political” stance or location of the interpreter will have a great deal to do with how the text is read and interpreted. Many find in the text confirmation that the “old” (traditional) ways are best and most reflective of God’s will for family and church. Others, coming to the text with a painful history of brokenness in familial and economic relationships, have experienced this text as either cover for the church’s complicity in this brokenness, or even as a cudgel used against them. Especially if they also come to the text open to hearing the word of God, they experience great tension.

The interpreter needs to be as conscious as possible of her or his own interests, perspectives, hopes, and fears, and to be aware of, and pastorally sensitive to, the experiences of others. The ground interpreters stand on is holy because it is Scripture they are interpreting. It is also holy because experiences of women and men, children and parents, and slaves and masters render it so. These experiences are sometimes marked by courageous fidelity to a gospel of the new creation, but too often by oppression and dehumanization.

For example, I bring to the interpretation of this text the tools of a scholar and also my own experience as husband of a pastor with whom I share parenting and household duties. I celebrate the full participation and ministry of women in church, home, and workplace as consistent with the gospel and also as fruit of the gospel (Yoder Neufeld, 1990:289–99). However, as a privileged and educated male, I am less vulnerable than many women, children, and men who are powerless as they struggle to survive.

I worked on this text when I was on sabbatical leave in Central America and became acutely aware of such variant perspectives. Most of the women and men there are peasants, with little if any power and little if any land to call their own, people for whom economic slavery is an everyday reality. Women and children live a doubly vulnerable life, often subjected to abuse in their own homes.

In my own country, Canada, too many women and children know what it is to be subject to authoritarian and often abusive husbands and fathers. They know what it is to have such behavior

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tacitly if not explicitly sanctioned by appeal to texts such as the Household Code in Ephesians (Heggen; Melissa A. Miller; Thistlethwaite). Too many men know what it is to be unemployed or underemployed, and thus what it means to be subject to the whims of a cruel master, even if that master turns out to be the faceless market. Many, especially women, have experienced this text as “dangerous to their health” (Russell, 1985:141).

Interpreters of this text are today keenly conscious of their and others’ experience. But they also listen attentively in and through the text for the voice of God. Such listening is not always easy. It is troubling, for example, how in this text little more than *fear* is commended to wives, even if interpreted as “respect” or “awe” (5:21, 33). Such *fear* is especially disturbing since the author intends to set forth a *positive* vision of family life as the context for the imitation of Christ. This text is hardly adequate *by itself* to provide a vision for the place and role of wives in a marriage relationship.

At the same time, to listen in this text for the word of God as a husband, father, and boss—surely the intended first row of the audience—brings considerable discomfort. He is invited to imitate one whose lordship and headship takes the form of passionate and self-sacrificing love. He will be troubled that, as father, he is singled out for an explicit warning not to be abusive. But he will also be heartened, if somewhat overwhelmed, by the exhortation to be his children’s teacher in the school of Christ—learning and teaching them to be servants of others. Surely the many husbands and fathers who have *learned Christ* well (4:20) are proof enough that to take up the challenge to love *as Christ loved* will fatally corrode the structures of support for male privilege. If something other was intended, then the writer made a great mistake by holding before the readers this model—the Christ we encounter in these and the other pages of the NT.

There remains the question of whether this text “cements” patriarchal relationships (e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983:270) or whether it subverts them. We cannot settle this argument apart from how real people read this text and live it out in the varying social configurations we call “family.” Nor can it be settled apart from who the Christ is, the one who is encountered in the text and followed in life. The only convincing rebuttal to the charge that this text should be expunged from the operative canon of Christians is that husbands, fathers, and bosses practice servanthood in imitation of the *Lord* modeled for them in this text.

The power of conversion and transformation does not lie in the text or in the success of its argument, but in the Spirit of the servant Christ. The writer signals this by appending the Household Code grammatically to the command to be filled with the Spirit (5:18, notes; Schematic Trans.).

Are Husbands the Saviors of Wives?

Many women will insist that their salvation—their liberation—is not and should not be dependent on their husbands as the church’s salvation depends on Christ. That is certainly correct, **in that the analogy between Christ and husband is limited.** The objection goes deeper, however. The analogy itself is viewed as deeply permeated with patriarchal assumptions that it will be the husband who will save the wife, and not vice versa. There is a measure of truth in this objection.

However, as careful as we must be with the analogy between Christ and husband, we must remember that in Ephesians the appeal for husbands to be concerned for the liberation/salvation of their wives is being made in a patriarchal cultural context. Indeed, the text presupposes such

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a social structure. It places before the socially *dominant* member of the marriage relationship the summons to pattern his behavior after the *Lord*.

Restating the Household Code today for *equal* partners in marriage would and *should* sound different (so also Jewett: 139–41; Lincoln: 393–4). However, now as then, instructions for a household would *with equal force* need to put before *anyone* who exercises responsibility, freedom, and authority in a relationship—husband *and* wife, father *and* mother—the call to imitate Christ. To do so is to mimic a *Lord* whose headship comes to fullest expression in the liberation of the *other*, in the empowerment of the *other*, and in loving and self-denying servanthood *for the sake of the other*. That remains a challenge deeply disturbing and destabilizing to all social arrangements, inside or outside the church.

Furthermore, such a reformulation will invite husbands and wives alike to participate in the mystery of Christ and the church (5:32), to render their marriage a drama of liberation, empowerment, peacemaking, reconciliation, and boundless love. Their marriage then becomes a place where the great ingathering of all things in Christ (1:10) is experienced and proclaimed. Therein lies the timeless and always radical component in the Household Code as we find it in Ephesians.

Revolutionary Subordination?

There is much in this analysis and interpretation of the Household Code that echoes the well-known and controversial treatment by the late John H. Yoder (1994:162–92, “Revolutionary Subordination”). I share his view that, regardless of the origin of this tradition, the appeal to Christ in the Household Code carries a germ of change more than of legitimation for prevailing social structures.

Nevertheless, on some points I diverge from Yoder. It is important to distinguish clearly, in a way Yoder does not, the argument underlying the use of the Code in 1 Peter from that in Ephesians (and in the earlier Colossians; TBC). In 1 Peter, the appeal to Christ serves to strengthen the resolve of those enduring injustice to suffer in light both of the evangelistic potential of suffering and the imminent judgment and liberation of God (so also Schertz, 1992a; Waltner: 82–118). The argument one might take up with 1 Peter is not whether or not patriarchy is a good thing, but whether it should be endured, and whether suffering under it makes sense.

If there is anything revolutionary about the subordination called for in the Code as found in 1 Peter, it resides in bringing about the conversion of the dominant partner through faithful subordination. Of crucial importance is understanding that such evangelistic suffering is inseparable from God’s intervention as judge and liberator. That argument is not by nature any different from the one that pacifism or nonresistance must make in *all* situations of injustice. Much of Yoder’s treatment of the Household Code relates to this sort of a historical and theological context (1994:185).

In Ephesians, as in Colossians, the Household Code is put forward as an essentially positive vision of social relations. Suffering is not a central issue. Christ is *not* presented as a reassuring fellow-sufferer. He is instead put forward as a model for the *superordinated* member of the family. The Ephesian Code will thus be revolutionary only if already-dominant partners in the relationship hear the summons to *mutual* subordination as directed first and foremost to them, and if the Christ they take as model is Lord in being a slave.

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Yoder's construct of a church "tempted" to "impose" its vision of liberty "*violently* upon the social order *beyond* the confines of the church" (1994:185, italics added) hardly fits the situation of 1 Peter. There the subordinates are in no position to rebel other than at great cost to themselves. They are most certainly not in any position to impose anything on anyone. Nor does it fit Ephesians, where the light falls on relationships *within* the church, and only indirectly on witness to the world at large. The chief (albeit not exclusive) audience in Ephesians is made up of those in *dominant* social positions *within* the church community.

The author of Ephesians is hardly arguing with males *too* eager (J. H. Yoder, 1994:190) to overthrow patriarchy. Instead, Ephesians plays on their existing sense of superior status and cajoles them to redefine their already-existing dominance as servanthood in imitation of Christ. This is nothing less than "revolution from above." But it is revolutionary *only* if it goes beyond ameliorating an inherently unjust structure and successfully subverts it in the interests of those in the weaker social positions. Only then is it love as Christ loved; only then does family life participate in the creation of *the new human* (2:15).

Such self-sacrificing love of the socially dominant is *not* a curtailment of Christian liberty. It is the full and powerful exercise of freedom! Yoder is correct in asserting that the church should not "impose" its gospel of liberty on the world (1994:185). At the same time, if the church is to be in a position to *inform the powers of the multivariied wisdom of God* (3:10), members of "Wisdom's body" must exercise that gospel *within* the church (as Yoder himself reminds us; 1994:148; 1994a: 56, 61). For members of Christ's body, what is expected of the church is more important than what can be expected of society with regard to changes in structural relationships of inequity and injustice. Change should "begin with the household of God," to echo 1 Peter 4:17. That is a necessary implication of calling the church the body of *Christ*.

The Household Code and Suffering

Anabaptist theology has typically had greater affinity with suffering rather than with power and lordship. In that community, studies of the Household Code have thus focused more on 1 Peter (e.g., Schertz, 1992a; Waltner: 82–118). Even when they have spoken generically to the Household Code, Anabaptist scholars have done so largely through the prism represented by the dynamics of 1 Peter (cf. Schroeder, 1959; 1990; J. H. Yoder, 1994:162–92). Thankfully, there is today heightened sensitivity to the suffering of women and children at the hands of husbands, fathers, and leaders. Thus in this present context, the challenge of 1 Peter's "pacifist" approach remains a troubling one for the church (e.g., essays by Gerber Koontz, Penner, and Schertz in Elizabeth Yoder, 1992).

Ephesians puts as great a challenge before those who find themselves in positions of power and privilege: can husbands, fathers, and bosses be converted? How and for whom will they exercise their power? Are they strong enough to relinquish power? Can they follow Jesus in such a way that social structures are humanized and also transformed into the image of the Christ? These are the kinds of questions Anabaptist men are less used to answering. But they are critically important for those increasingly at home in the world and its structures and habits of power.

Gather us in—the rich and the haughty,
gather us in—the proud and the strong.
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song. (HWB: 6, stanza 2)

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Christ and the Church

On a different but crucial note, the relationship between Christ and the church is at least as important to the author as that between husband and wife, if not more so (5:31). The controversy in our day around the wife-husband relationship has made it difficult to appreciate what the present text offers. It invites us to recover a relationship with Christ that exults in the gracious intimacy believers can enjoy with the divine, individually and corporately. The search in our day for spiritual depth and immediacy in prayer and music is witness to a deep yearning among believers for recovery of “first love” (Rev. 2:4). Some are rediscovering the spirituality of medieval mystics; others have found a new breath of air in charismatic renewal.

Our text serves notice that such warm spirituality is best found and exercised at the center of everyday familial, social, and economic obligations. It is an insight close to the heart of Anabaptism that worship, spirituality, and ethics are not in tension with each other; they are to be found in the one and same place.

Ephesians 6:10–20

Waging Peace: Putting on the Armor of God

PREVIEW

With 6:10–20 we come to the climactic conclusion of Ephesians. The various strands of emphasis on power and fullness pervading the letter are finally pulled together. What emerges is a striking image of the church at the center of God’s saving action. Since Ephesians would have been read aloud to audiences, this rousing call to battle performs the function of what students of ancient rhetoric call a “peroration.” In a peroration, the author or speaker recapitulates the main themes of the letter or speech to motivate the audience to action (Lincoln: 432–3; Perkins: 141; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:110). The imitation of God (5:1) relates to forgiveness and kindness, but also to doing battle with the cosmic forces resisting the gathering up of all things in Christ (1:10).

The call to take up arms in a cosmic struggle comes somewhat as a surprise after the focus on the microcosm of the household in 5:21–6:9. *Cosmic* in no way excludes the arena of human relationships, however. Indeed, Ephesians aptly places the Household Code immediately *after* the call to nonconformity (5:3–21) and *before* the summons to take up God’s armor. Thus the author challenges readers to understand that what they see as “only” everyday social relationships are actually an arena of struggle with the powers.

Ephesians 6:10–13 gives a summons to be empowered with God’s own power. Believers are to put on God’s own armor. The armor in verses 14–17 probably reminded first-century readers of soldiers they saw daily. More important, however, the author draws on the tradition of *God* putting on armor, as found specifically in Isaiah 59:17 (TBC). So the call to put on God’s armor is a summons for readers to imitate the divine warrior. Not surprisingly, the enemy, in proportion to such an armor, is the devil and his forces. Verses 14–17 describe the warrior in God’s armor as clad in truth, justice, faith, and salvation, ready to announce peace, and wielding the word of God.

Verses 18–20 bring the metaphor of battle to a close with a focus on prayer as struggle and as a stance of solidarity among saints “at war.” Paul is presented one final time as a messenger bound, an *ambassador in chains*, illustrating how deeply ironic is the power and freedom of the gospel and its messengers.

Structure of 6:10–20

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Henceforth, be empowered in the Lord!

Put on God's armor

so that you might be able to resist the devil and the powers of evil!

Take up God's armor

so that at the end of that evil day you will be standing!

Stand!

- girded with truth
- having put on justice
- ready to announce the good news of peace
- having taken up the shield of faith (fulness)

Grasp!

- the helmet of salvation/liberation!
- and the sword of God's word,
- praying at all times
for all the saints
and also for me,
for boldness to make known the gospel,
for which I am an ambassador in chains.

The distinctive way Ephesians handles this material is noticeable in comparing Ephesians with Colossians. Notice that Colossians moves from the Household Code in 3:18–4:1 immediately to a call to prayer in 4:2–4. As in the case of the Household Code, Ephesians modifies Colossians by wedging the call to battle between the Household Code and the call to prayer. The call to vigilance and prayer is thereby welded both grammatically and conceptually to the call to arms.

A note of caution: most commentators like to envision the *individual* Christian in the armor (e.g., Best, 1998:586; Thurston: 145). Support for an individualistic interpretation grows if the passage is read in light of Cynic-Stoic views of life as battle (e.g., Malherbe, 143–74; Lincoln: 437–8, with survey). However, this limits what kind of struggle is imagined and misses the biblical allusions to God as the divine warrior. It is much more in keeping with the gist of Ephesians to see this summons to battle directed to the church *as a whole*, to the *body of Christ* acting as a unified divine force (so also Barth, 1974:791; Schnackenburg: 285; cf. Yoder Neufeld, 1997:111).

OUTLINE

Summons to Divine Warfare, 6:10–13

The Divine Armor, 6:14–17

6:14a	Truth
6:14b	Righteousness/Justice
6:15	Peace
6:16	Faith (fulness)
6:17a	Salvation/Liberation

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6:17b Spirit/Word of God

Prayer as Struggle and Solidarity, 6:18–20

6:18 Vigilant and Alert Prayer in the Spirit

6:19–20 Praying for Paul

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Summons to Divine Warfare 6:10–13

Henceforth readers are to take up God's power (6:10). *Finally* (NIV, NRSV) does not show quite as clearly as does *henceforth* (both possible translations of *tou loipou*) that this is the climax of the exhortation of chapters 4–6 and thus the reason for the previous buildup around power and identification with Christ (e.g., 1:19–23; 3:20). *Henceforth* may reflect as well the context of a baptismal challenge (6:11, notes about "putting on"; cf. 4:22, 24–25, notes).

The imperative *Be empowered!* is striking, for the Bible rarely uses the imperative in relation to *divine* empowerment, no doubt because it is God alone who empowers (cf. Rom. 4:20; Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12). But we have repeatedly observed in Ephesians how much the church is invested with status and initiative. So, while it may strike us as presumptuous, we should read this as "Seize power! Fill yourselves with God's power!"

This reminds us of the ancient battle calls found in the OT, where God is called to rise up and make war against his enemies on behalf of his people (Exod. 15:3; Num. 10:35; Ps. 35:1–3, 22–28; Isa. 42:13; Judg. 5:12, where the people are to rise to do battle).

Three words for power are strung together in verse 10. *Be empowered with the strength of the Lord's might!* On the surface, this is typical of an author who often likes to use as many words as possible (Schnackenburg: 271). We might also hear a faint echo of Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 16:13: "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong!" (NRSV). Or we might identify *Lord* with Christ and recall Ephesians 3:16–17, where the indwelling Christ strengthens believers.

Here, however, the use of a chain of power terms indicates something more. Stringing together power terms is a way to characterize the greatness of *God's* power. Already in 1:19 we find a chain of synonyms illustrating how overwhelming is the power of God that raised Christ from the dead and made him victorious over all powers. Colossians 1:11, which lurks in the background, also heaps up synonyms to depict God's power.

Both Colossians and Ephesians imitate Isaiah 40: "He who sits above the circle of the earth ... is great in *strength*, *mighty* in *power*" (40:22, 26, italics added). Closer in time to Ephesians, such language also appears in Qumran's famous War Scroll as a way to ascribe ultimate victory and power to God, even though much of the scroll is taken up with orders for God's troops, the "sons of light" (1QM 11.4–5). The wording of the summons in Ephesians 6:10 becomes thus a measure of the breathtakingly lofty status the writer of Ephesians accords the saints (Yoder Neufeld, 1997:116).

Ephesians goes one step further. The church is called on to *put on God's whole armor* (*panoplia*, lit., "whole or complete armor"). This is sometimes interpreted to mean that God

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provides the necessary protection for the struggles of life. This armor is not what God is wearing but what God provides the believer. However, by drawing explicitly from Isaiah 59 for several items of armor, the author makes sure readers see that it is God's own armor that the community is to don (TBC).

The stress is on the communal body of believers inhabiting the armor of the divine warrior, rather than on the individual believer donning the metaphorical armor of the Roman soldier, as too often claimed (R. Martin, 1991:75; Thurston: 147–8). It is *God's* battle the church is called to wage (so also Schnackenburg: 272). To *put on* recalls the putting on of *the new human*, who is none other than the Messiah (4:24; cf. 2:15–16; cf. Rom. 13:12, 14). To *put on* is therefore also an allusion to baptism (cf. 4:22–24, notes).

Everything about the origin of this motif in the tradition of the divine warrior tells us that this is not a defensive struggle (contra Berkhof: 52; Best, 1993:60; 1998:588; Klassen, 1984:128). Nor is it only a mop-up after the victory has been won (contra Thurston: 145; Lincoln: 442–3). Yes, the resurrection of Christ implies the defeat of the powers (1:19–23, notes). Yes, final victory is assured. But such assurance always and necessarily *precedes* divine warfare in the Bible; it in no way underplays the gravity of the struggle that is about to ensue (e.g., Josh. 6:2; Judg. 7:9; 1 Sam. 24:4; von Rad: 42–4).

In Ephesians, the celebration of power and fullness is not meant to downplay the present and future struggle for the salvation of the world, but as in ancient warfare, to give courage for that struggle. The battle is real, even if the outcome is assured. The enemy is real, even if not *blood and flesh*. The armor and the weapons are real, even if they are “only” the persistent and prayerful exercise of truth, peace, justice, and the word of God.

Paul anticipates “nonfleshly” warfare in 2 Corinthians 10:3–6, where his “weapons of war” are pointed at the disobedient Corinthians. More closely related, the specific choice of imagery shows that the church's struggle is an essential component of the battle described in 1 Corinthians 15:24–25. Paul there describes Christ's reign or kingdom as successful warfare against the powers of evil. The summons to battle in Ephesians means that Christ's body—those who have been raised to life and seated with him in the heavenlies (2:6; cf. 1:20–23)—is also participating in Christ's reign (so also Barth, 1974:804). This is the eschatological battle; this is the *evil day* (6:13), however many *evil days* (5:16) that *day* might entail. The church lives in the eschatological moment, *buying out the time* (5:16, notes), which, as it turns out, implies taking the struggle to heal the cosmos to its very edges (so also Schnackenburg: 275–6).

To be sure, the church does not displace God. After all, for the church to be the body of God's Messiah (1:23), for it to possess the fullness of God (1:23; 3:19), for believers to be raised and seated in the heavenlies with the Messiah (2:5–6)—all this is the result of God's grace (2:8–10). Human pride and accomplishment are excluded (2:9). But that should not obscure the encouraging and sobering nature of this summons to put on God's armor. It is encouraging because the “size” of the armor banishes all thought of fear in the face of the enemy. It is sobering because it implies an arena of battle that pits the church against God's enemies.

The call to *stand* in the phrase *so that you may be able to stand against the strategies of the devil* increases the force of the summons. Such *standing against* is not a passive or even just a defensive stance. In Exodus 14:13, “standing” is admittedly the proper stance of the people in face of God's warring on their behalf. In the present passage, however, God's people are

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themselves summoned to inhabit the role of that divine warrior. “Standing” has thus taken on a decidedly different coloring. The power and armor of God enable believers to *stand against*, to resist and finally undo the *strategies* (lit., *crafty methods*) of the devil. A resilient, courageous, and ultimately victorious *standing* is one of the most important motifs in this passage (cf. 6:13–14; Arnold, 1989:120; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:129–31).

Verse 11 identifies the enemy as *the devil* (*diabolos*; lit., “slanderer, one who throws into confusion” [*Powers*]). While this is the same *evil one* we meet in 2:2 (cf. 6:16), the term *devil* appears also in 4:27 but is rare in the letters bearing Paul’s name (1 Tim. 3:6–7). Verse 12 stipulates that the struggle is *not with blood and flesh*. Why does that need to be said? Perhaps some believers were experiencing firsthand the hostility of authorities or rival religious groups, even if this letter gives no specific evidence of that. They might have been tempted to see such hostile persons as the actual enemy.

Further, we have noted earlier the frequent points of contact between Ephesians and the thought and language of the community at Qumran, by the Dead Sea. Thus the scroll called *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* makes it explicit that the final battle against the forces of evil will be most immediately against its “blood and flesh” representatives (e.g., 1QM 12.11–12; 15.13; 19.4; cf. CD 1.2). Perhaps some readers of Ephesians would have entertained such thoughts. The explicit rejection of warfare against *human* enemies in this letter is consistent with the strong peace emphasis in 2:14–16, echoed here in 6:15.

The need to explicitly reject warfare against *blood and flesh* was no doubt prompted also by the author’s use of the tradition of the armor of God as found in Isaiah 59, Wisdom of Solomon 5, and 1 Thessalonians 5 (TBC). The history of this motif shows that most often in the Bible, “blood and flesh” is what becomes the object of divine warfare. In Isaiah and Wisdom of Solomon, it is fleshly human society gone bad that God wars against as judge and executioner (TBC). Even 1 Thessalonians 5, where the image of the divine warrior has undergone radical transformation (5:8), identifies human beings sitting in darkness (5:4) as the object of the divine warrior’s intervention (5:2–3).

In Ephesians, we can observe a rather significant transformation of the tradition at this point. *Blood and flesh* are *not* the enemy. *Blood and flesh* are under the control of the enemy (2:2, notes). The church must struggle against that enemy, not against the victims of that enemy.

Markus Barth misses this point by suggesting that the author’s choice of the rare term *palē* (*struggle*) over *polemos* (*war*) or *machē* (*fight*) reflects pacifist tendencies (1974:764). Most often in ancient literature, *palē* does refer to athletic “wrestling,” but it can also refer to conflict and warfare generally (Greeven: 721). More important, however deeply concerned about peace, the author of Ephesians has absolutely no interest in playing down the gravity of the warfare here described. Indeed, the call to *divine* empowerment and the summons to put on the *divine* armor suggests quite the opposite. To state it ironically, pacifism is *real* warfare against enmity (cf. 2:11–22, esp. 2:6, notes).

The list of the powers in 6:12 is impressive: *rulers* (*archai*), *authorities* (*exousiai*), *cosmic potentates* (*kosmokratores*) of this darkness, *spiritual aspects* (*pneumatika*; lit., *spiritualities*) of evil in the heavens. *Rulers* and *authorities* are familiar from 1:21; the others are found only here. Some of the terms are drawn from the political realm (*rulers, authorities*); others may have had astrological connotation (*cosmic potentates*; Arnold, 1989:65–8; Best, 1998:593–4).

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Whatever the origins of these terms, they are intended to be shorthand for the myriad of powers, great and small, personal and impersonal, individual and systemic, that resist the saving activity of God among humanity (Lincoln: 445; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:122–4 [*Powers*]).

The translation of the concluding item on the list, *pneumatika*, illustrates this comprehensiveness. *Pneumatika* is a neuter plural of the adjective “spiritual,” literally translated as “spiritualities” or “spiritual things” or “matters.” NIV and NRSV have *spiritual forces*. But in 1 Corinthians 2:13, NRSV translates that same term as “spiritual things” and NIV as “spiritual truths.” So “the spiritual dimensions or aspects of evil” might be a better translation than “spiritual forces.” This widens the sense of what the church is called upon to struggle against.

To further specify that these *spiritualities* are *in the heavenlies* is not a reference to things or places above and beyond the plane of human experience. Such language indicates status more than place. After all, believers are already *in the heavenlies* (cf. 2:6). *In the heavenlies* means that these evil potencies have the status of overlords over human affairs (cf. 2:2). But the power and armor of God, worn by those who *in and with Christ* are also *in the heavenlies*, make the church more than a match for them.

By means of the stress on comprehensiveness in the list of evil powers, the author indicates that the church is to take up the struggle with *all* the powers resisting God’s saving designs for the cosmos. Any restrictive definition of the powers undervalues the victory of Christ and thereby defeats the central argument in Ephesians. We recall 1:21, where Christ has been given victory over *all principalities, powers, dominions, authorities, and every name*. The allusive list of powers in 6:12 is therefore suggestive of the full range of evil into which the *authority of the air* lures the *sons of disobedience* (2:1–3; notes on “culture of darkness,” 5:11–14; “Light and Darkness,” TBC for 5:3–21 [*Powers*]).

As a bridge to the description of the armor itself, the author reiterates in 6:13 the call to *take up the whole armor of God*. In 6:11 the saints were asked to *put on* the armor, suggesting protective gear; now in 6:13 the language suggests taking up weapons. This is to be done so that the saints may be able (lit.) *to resist on the evil day*. NRSV’s *withstand* (NIV, *stand your ground*) has a defensive connotation that does not fit the imagery the author has chosen here. *Resist* in the sense of “to oppose” captures the sense of “standing against” much better.

The reference to *the evil day* in 6:13 is puzzling. We might take *evil day* to refer to the time of the final eschatological battle, when God and his holy ones overcome the devil and his evil forces. However, Ephesians generally gives little attention to traditional apocalyptic eschatology [*Apocalypticism*]. Perhaps, then, *the evil day* refers to any of the days of battle, with all the struggle, pain, and sacrifice they bring with them, without intending any particular eschatological scenario (note the plural *evil days* in 5:16).

As often, a solution might lie in combining the two notions. Since we recognize the important ties between 1 Corinthians 15:24–27 and Ephesians 6:10–20 (cf. 1:19–23, notes), we can be sure that the author wants “those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:23) to see the present struggle as part of a final decisive messianic battle to the finish. This is true however long that battle might last, no matter how many *days* (5:16) such a *day* might contain (cf. Arnold, 1989:113–5; Barth, 1974:804; Best, 1998:597; Schnackenburg: 275–6). “Final” and “decisive” does not imply “the end of history” (contra Lincoln: 446), but the day(s) before all things are fully and completely

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gathered up in the peace that is Christ. Then history, *the coming ages* (2:7), can finally ensue, with *God* being *all in all* (4:6; cf. 1 Cor. 15:28).

Verse 13 presents the translator with one more puzzle. NIV and NRSV translate *katergazomai* as *having done everything*. True, the term usually carries the sense of “doing” or “producing” in the Pauline literature (e.g., Rom. 2:9; 4:15; 7:15; 15:18; 1 Cor. 5:3; 2 Cor. 4:17; 5:5; Phil. 2:12). But *what* are believers to have *done*? The most immediate answer might be putting on the armor. After all, the command to *stand* is repeated in Ephesians 6:14. Believers are to stand, having put on (past tense!) the *belt*, the *breastplate*, and the *shoes*. But the term *katergazomai* can also mean “to defeat” or “to destroy,” which would appear to fit the present context of struggle and battle just as well or better (BAGD: 421; Bertram, 1965:634–5; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:128–9).

Hence, the sentence reads, *And having conquered completely, to be standing*. In ancient warfare, the soldiers standing at the end of battle are showing themselves to be victorious. *Standing* is a sign of strength in battle, a stance of victory found all over the biblical and related literature (e.g., Ps. 18:33–34; Wisd. of Sol. 18:16, 21–23; 1QM 14.4–8).

The Divine Armor 6:14–17

The armor in which the church is to take its stand is elaborated in verses 14–17. As stated above, the tradition from which the author draws this image is chiefly Isaiah 59:17–19 and its dependent texts rather than the familiar armor of the Roman soldier (cf. texts and items of armor, in “Isaiah 59 and Its Offspring,” TBC).

We begin with some general observations. First, the armor is both metaphorical and real. The armor works as a metaphor only because in reality *truth, justice, peace, faith (fulness), the word of God, and prayer* are the effective means by which the powers are overcome. Those who interpret this passage in a more restrictedly “exorcistic” way must keep this in mind. The powers are vanquished through the exercise of truth, justice, peace, and liberation, just as they are through the exercise of the word and prayer. The emphasis in this metaphor falls on those virtues and actions, and not on the elements of armor that are the vehicle of the metaphor (*belt, shoes, etc.*). The specific items of armor and weaponry are to some extent interchangeable (TBC, on diverse ways this image is appropriated).

Second, by reaching behind 1 Thessalonians 5 to Isaiah 59, the author of Ephesians makes clear that the armor is *God’s*. This has important implications for how one reads the metaphor of the armed warrior as a whole. The pedigree of the motif shows that the metaphor is intrinsically more offensive than it is defensive (contra Berkhof: 47–50).

Third, although vengeance and wrath are part of God’s warring in Isaiah and Wisdom of Solomon and set the context for the image in 1 Thessalonians 5, however ironically (Elias: 206–9; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:84–93), they are not stressed in Ephesians (even if present; 5:5–7, notes). The battle against the powers is nevertheless real, and their defeat is certain. Vengeance and wrath are not explicitly present likely because of their association with divine warfare *against blood and flesh*. And that is *not* the nature of this struggle.

The whole armor of God depicted in the following verses is meant to show that the faithful community is called to *stand* (cf. 6:11, 13). They are also to *do* God’s work, to *act* as the Messiah’s body through the exercise of the same virtues and actions that have marked God’s saving intervention in the past. These virtues and actions are *truth, justice, peace, faithfulness/solidarity, salvation/liberation, the word, and prayer*.

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6:14a Truth

Truth (*alētheia*) is at the head of the list of armor, identified with the girding of the loins. The pride of place given to *truth* should not surprise us since the author has already greatly stressed *truth* throughout the letter (1:13; 4:15, 21, 24–25; 5:9). Significantly, *truth* marks both the nature of God's presence in the world in Jesus (4:21, 24) and the way those who have *put on Christ* are to behave toward each other (4:15, 25). Its presence here is particularly reminiscent of the Greek (LXX) version of Isaiah 11:5, where God's anointed one will gird himself with truth.

That *truth* is here included in the *armor* shows that for the author the exercise of *truth* is more than a matter of being honest, as much as integrity and "trustworthiness" (Houlden: 339) are essential components of readiness for a struggle with the powers. *Truth* is an active dimension of the church's life. It is a way in which God intervenes in a world whose culture is best characterized as *the lie* (4:25–27, notes). It means upholding standards of gracious integrity *within* the community of *the new human* (4:15, 25). It means speaking the "truth-full" good news to those still under the sway of evil (e.g., 2:2, 17; there is no good reason to exclude this dimension from its meaning, as do Lincoln: 448; Schnackenburg: 277, n. 29).

Exercising *truth* also means speaking to the powers the *truth* that is in Jesus (4:21), *the multivariied wisdom of God* (3:10; Berkhof: 50–1). The exercise of *truth* in word and deed will often be highly conflictual. *Truth* is experienced often as an attack and is therefore often vigorously and sometimes violently resisted. The *truth* is armor against the deceitful strategies of powers resisting the truth (6:11; cf. 4:14). It is also a weapon with which to undo *the lie*.

6:14b Righteousness/Justice

The next piece of armor is the *breastplate of righteousness/justice*. *Righteousness* and *justice* both translate the one Greek word *dikaïosunē*. For purposes of hearing the full range of meaning, I have placed both terms together in this discussion. Along with *truth*, *righteousness/justice* has already been identified as the *fruit of light* in 5:9, and as the means through which *the new human* is created (with *the holiness of truth*, 4:24). To relate *righteousness* to "justification" is of little help in this case (contra Barth, 1974:795–7). It may even be a hindrance because it stresses that righteousness is what God imputes to the believer on the basis of faith, and not by works (2:8–10, notes).

A quite different understanding is at work here: the point is *doing* the *right* thing. Notice in Isaiah 59:17 that God puts on *righteousness/justice* as, the *breastplate*. God does so because there is no one who practices *justice*, no one to intervene on behalf of those who are being killed and tortured in the public square (59:7, 14). The armor signals the nature of God's intervention as judge and liberator. *Righteousness* is what God *does* as warrior—it is *justice* at work. We should not think of the *breastplate of righteousness/justice* in Ephesians as the safe cocoon of impunity (as many understand "justification"). Instead, it is the active participation in the divine battle against the powers on behalf of their victims.

As in the case of God in Isaiah 59, *justice* is what the saints put on; *justice* is what saints practice (cf. Isa. 11:5). In Isaiah 59, God could find no one to intervene. In Ephesians 6, the church wears justice on its breast, so that now there *is* someone to intervene.

6:15 Peace

Ephesians introduces a novel element to the divine armor in verse 15. Believers are to have *feet shod in readiness* (*hetoimasia*) to announce the good news of peace. Interpreting the passage

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in essentially defensive terms, Best opts for translating *hetoimasia* as *firmness*, having firm footwear so as to (with)stand the onslaughts of the enemies (Best, 1998:599–600). As valuable as is firm footwear, *readiness* communicates the holy impatience to get the good news of peace out. *Peace* is, after all, a central concern of Ephesians, as we see in 2:11–22, most beautifully expressed in the hymn of 2:14–16.

The presence of *peace* in this passage on armor has been called a “lofty paradox” (Harnack, 1963:13; cf. Schnackenburg: 278). There is a paradox if the gospel of peace is a part of the “arsenal” of the divine warrior. It is a paradox of sorts also if the gospel of peace makes one ready to do battle (Lincoln: 449). The author already hints at the paradox in 2:16, where the one who himself is peace *murders* enmity through his own death.

Compelling as such observations are, another interpretation may be more persuasive. There is no paradox in the readiness of a warrior to announce peace once hostile powers have been defeated (Yoder Neufeld, 1997:137–9). In the background is the image of the messenger of peace in Isaiah 52:7, who comes announcing peace, the cessation of conflict (cf. Isa. 57:19, used in Eph. 2:17; cf. Rom. 10:15; contra Best, 1998:600). Indeed, to speak here of *readiness to announce peace* means that peace is not yet fully present, however much Christ has already made peace between Jews and Gentiles (2:11–22). The *gathering up of all things in Christ* (1:10) remains an ongoing conflictual process in which the church is to play an essential role. Such a struggle is in actual experience the practice of suffering love in imitation of the ultimate announcer of peace, Christ; yet it is also an assault on the powers.

6:16 Faith (Fulness)

Another novel item of armor is the *shield of faith (pistis)* with which to *quench the flaming darts of the evil one*. This image of the shield of faith is almost universally interpreted as defensive. The shield is needed to fend off the fiery darts of the attacking evil one. But to identify the shield as defensive does not tell us whether the one wearing the shield is on the defensive or the offensive in a battle. Ancient depictions of siege warfare in both word and picture show that shields were carried by the forces putting a city under siege, fending off the fiery arrows of the defenders (Yoder Neufeld, 1997:139–40; Perkins: 146–7, acknowledging this, does not draw the conclusion).

A shield *is*, of course, by its very nature defensive. *Trust* or *confidence* in God’s power *is* a critical part of the armor in this passage. Throughout the Psalms, God is called a “shield” (e.g., Pss. 3:3; 5:12; 7:10; 18:2, 30, 35; 35:1–3; 59:11; 76:3; 115:9–11; 119:114; 144:2). The last phrase of Psalm 91:4 is highly reminiscent of the Ephesians text:

He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

Psalm 28:7 also anticipates Ephesians’ stress on divine power in relation to the armor:

The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.

But a defensive interpretation of this image does not capture the thought of Ephesians. In 6:16, the readers are not depicted as dependent on the protection of the divine warrior, as true

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as that dependency is in the lives of those who have *faith*. The bracing nature of the present summons emerges because such dependency is taken for granted. In this instance, the believers themselves are the warrior!

As the discussion of the Pauline phrase “saved by faith” in 2:8 showed, *pistis* can mean “trust,” in this case in God’s power to save (Lincoln: 449). With the article it is often translated as “the faith,” referring to the content of “Christian faith” (as Best, 1998:601, interprets it here). But *pistis* can also mean *faithfulness* (cf. notes on 1:1 and 3:12; Bultmann and Weiser; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:139, n. 140). It is through Christ’s *faithfulness* toward us that we have been granted boldness and confidence. So putting on the *shield of pistis* is another way of participating in messianic *faithfulness*.

God’s faithful action in Christ provides the undergirding for the community engaged in mortal combat with the powers. To the same abundant extent, the exercise of this armor means that the saints can be counted on to *keep faith with blood and flesh*, to intervene on their behalf. *Faithfulness* means “solidarity,” here with God and with humanity.

The image of the shield of *faithfulness* is thus every bit as offensive as it is defensive. The church is called to put the powers under siege. The shield is part of the arsenal of intervention, as Psalm 35:1–3 illustrates forcefully, where God is asked to take up shield and buckler, spear and javelin, and to intervene on behalf of the afflicted.

6:17a Salvation/Liberation

Ephesians now returns to a specific element of God’s armor in Isaiah 59:17, *the helmet of salvation* or, to use an entirely fitting synonym, *liberation*. Its presence in the list is highlighted by the fact that whereas the putting on of previous items of armor was grammatically related to the command to stand in 6:14, a new imperative is sounded here: *Take up the helmet!* In Isaiah 59, God is the one who puts on *the helmet of salvation*. This background means that one will want to be careful not to interpret the phrase of Ephesians 6:17 as the protection God offers the saints by assuring them of their own salvation (against many commentators who read it as “receive the helmet,” as in Best, 1998:602; Lincoln: 450).

True, the salvation of the believers is already assured (2:8). That is, after all, the gist of the whole first half of the letter. In the context of putting on the armor, however, the image of *grasping the helmet of salvation* is meant to place on the church the task of bringing liberation to those in bondage by imitating the God of Isaiah 59. Close attention to the vocabulary will support such an interpretation: Ephesians 6:17 uses the term for *salvation* found in the Greek of Isaiah 59:17 (LXX), *sōtērion*, rather than the more frequent *sōtēria* (Eph. 1:13; Paul in 1 Thess. 5:8). This indicates a deliberate connection to Isaiah 59 (Yoder Neufeld, 1997:87–9, 141–2, on Eph. 6:17; Isa. 59; 1 Thess. 5).

6:17b Spirit/Word of God

The saints are to take the *helmet of liberation* and *the sword of the Spirit*, the *word of God*. It is sometimes noted that the word for sword is *machaira*, which in Greco-Roman times referred to a dagger or small sword rather than the large sword called *xiphos* or *rhomphaia*. Sometimes interpreters draw the conclusion that the author wants to play down the militancy or aggressiveness of the text (e.g., Berkhof: 52; similarly Klassen, 1984:128; J. H. Yoder, 1994:203). However, the Greek Bible (LXX) early Christians used most frequently employs *machaira* to translate the Hebrew *herēb*, the term for “sword” used in such important divine warfare texts as

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Deuteronomy 32:41–42, Jeremiah 25:30–38 (32:30–38, LXX), and except for 66:16, always in Isaiah (e.g., 27:1; 34:5–6; 65:12).

Furthermore, the author of Ephesians is consciously using a *scriptural* metaphor, employing *scriptural* language, and is heavily dependent on Isaiah. Hence, the choice of *machaira* draws comparison with God as the divine warrior, not with the Roman soldier.

The rest of the image supports this interpretation. This sword is the *sword* of the *pneuma*, both *Spirit* and *wind* (2:1–2, notes). In both Isaiah 59:19 and Wisdom of Solomon 5:23, “wind” is part of the arsenal of the divine warrior. The overtones of power and force are not derived only from there, however. In Pauline churches, “Spirit” signified the powerful presence of God, the divine force of the eschatological future already “blowing” among believers (e.g., Rom. 8; Gal. 5; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 3). In Ephesians 6, *the sword of the Spirit (pneuma)* is set against *the spiritual aspects (pneumatika) of evil in the heavenlies*.

This sword is *the word of God*. In Ephesians the term *word of God* has not yet come into use as a synonym for Scripture. Instead, it refers to the whole variety of divine revelation and intervention. Though *word* here translates *rhēma*, that term is more or less synonymous with *logos* in 6:19 (Yoder Neufeld, 1997:144). The range of allusions is great (see, e.g., the *word* as means of *washing*, 5:26). Of interest to us here are particularly texts that show the *word* within contexts of divine warfare.

Notable in these divine warfare texts is the *logos* in Wisdom of Solomon 18, both as the name given to the avenging angel carrying the sword of judgment (18:14–16), and as the weapon by which the defender of the people wards off the angel of death (18:22). Compare also Isaiah 11:4, LXX, where the divinely chosen king smites the world with “the word of his mouth” (“word,” *logos* in Greek; in place of the Hebrew *shebet*, “rod”). Immediately following is the parallel phrase “breath (*pneuma*) of his lips” (Isa. 11:4, LXX). Strikingly similar to our text is Hebrews 4:12, where the “word (*logos*) of God” is like a “two-edged sword (*machaira*).” Revelation 1:16 and 2:12 illustrate the interchangeability of terms: the “two-edged sword” coming from the “mouth” of the exalted Christ is the *rhomphaia* (cf. 2:16; 19:15). Note also the close proximity of “the word of truth” and “the weapons of justice” in 2 Corinthians 6:7 (TRYN).

Again, we see that the author has chosen a symbol (*sword*) laden with overtones of divine intervention and power, even if he is not dependent on any one particular text.

The content of *the word* is left undefined. Some commentators are sure it can mean only “the gospel” (e.g., Arnold, 1989:111; Fee, 1987:729; Schnackenburg: 280). That identification is no doubt in large measure valid, all the more so if “gospel” is understood as rich and comprehensive “good news,” as multivariied in its scope and expression as is the wisdom of God (3:10). Others think it might refer to a slogan or formula intended to fend off the evil powers (Best, 1998:604; this is interpreted “exorcistically” by many of the so-called third wave [*Powers*]).

In this case it is important that the church understand the call to make *the word of God* effective. It is less important that specific content be given to the term *the word of God*. For the church to “wield” the *word of God* (as a *sword*) means that it must find ways of making sure that *word* does not “return ... empty” (Isa. 55:11). In his treatment of this text, Arthur Cochrane (128) appropriately points to Martin Luther’s famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress.”

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us;

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We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure;
For lo! his doom is sure;
One little *word* shall fell him. (trans. F. H. Hedge, italics added)

Prayer as Struggle and Solidarity 6:18–20

Translators typically treat this section as a discrete passage. Nevertheless, these three verses are grammatically dependent on the imperative in verse 17 calling on saints to *take up* the helmet and the sword (so also Fee, 1987:730) or, as some suggest, on the main imperative to *stand* in verse 14 (e.g., Arnold: 112; Barth, 1974:777; Lincoln: 451). In Greek, participles can function as imperatives, but it is best here to see these verses as grammatically connected to the rest of the armor. Prayer plays a central role in the struggle of the communal divine warrior. Prayer is battle. Prayer is also, however, a way to keep alert. It is a form of vigilance, of keeping the senses honed to danger and to opportunities for victory.

The importance Ephesians gives to prayer as part of the church's struggle with the powers is shown by comparison with Colossians 4:2–4, likely the source for these verses. Colossians makes no connection between wakefulness, prayer, and battle. It does not picture Christian life as battle. The powers have been defeated and have already been paraded in a victory procession (Col. 2:15; cf. E. Martin: 116). In Ephesians, prayer is "militarized" and drawn into the struggle with the powers. In doing so, Ephesians echoes the close connection of vigilance and alertness to divine warfare in Paul (e.g., Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Thess. 5:6, 8; cf. Arnold, 1989:112, exploring prayer as a means of struggling with the powers; Wink, 1992:308–14).

6:18 Vigilant and Alert Prayer in the Spirit

The critical importance given to prayer is indicated by the fact that it is to take place, literally, *in every time* (*kairos*, "loaded time"; 1:10, notes). Praying at every important moment becomes equivalent to *exploiting every opportune moment* (*kairos*; 5:16, notes). Hence the need for alertness. Again, we should not interpret this in a defensive sense. This is the corporate divine warrior on the lookout for opportunities to transform darkness into light.

The relationship of prayer to battle is further indicated by the fact that it is *in [the] Spirit* ["*In*"]. One might understand this as a reference to praying in tongues as prayer empowered by *the Spirit* (cf. Rom. 8:26–27; 1 Cor. 14:14–15; Fee, 1987:730–1). If such is intended, then this form of worship must be understood as combat with the powers, much as worship inspired by the filling of the Spirit is an act of courageous nonconformity and transformation (Eph. 5:18–21). In verse 17 *Spirit* is associated with *sword* and *word*. In this case we might think of praying *with the Spirit*, "wielding" the Spirit in prayer, unleashing the power of God. Neither interpretation should be excluded. It is clear that prayer is effective power-filled engagement in the struggle for the cosmos (on prayer as combat: Ellul, 1973:139–78, esp. 150–3; McClain: 69–73, 104–15; Wink, 1992:297–317).

But prayer is also the exercise of solidarity with fellow strugglers. *Pleading for all the saints* is a way in which members of the divine warrior participate in meeting each other's needs. In the Bible the divine warrior is the one who *responds* to the prayers of the needy (cf. Ps. 35:1–3).

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Hence, the implication is present that those who do the praying are themselves necessarily drawn into the response to that prayer (cf. Ellul, 1973:160–78).

6:19–20 Praying for Paul

After prayer has been offered *for all the saints*, it is also to be offered for Paul, that he *be given openness of mouth to boldly speak the word, the mystery of the good news*. In keeping with the way Ephesians places Paul behind the saints, at the end of the line, (3:8, notes), the request that Paul be prayerfully remembered *follows* the command to pray for all the saints. The saints find themselves in the armor and role of the divine warrior, but Paul is a prisoner, a divine emissary in chains (cf. 3:1; 4:1; for the image of *ambassador*, 6:20, see 2 Cor. 5:20; Philem. 9, NRSV note).

There is great irony in the image of an emissary in chains. A bound ambassador is a contradiction in terms—except from a Pauline perspective. Imprisonment brought great suffering to Paul (note esp. Philippians), but it only deepened his qualifications to be an ambassador of the one who went to the cross. In Paul’s day, the cross stood for shameful torture and execution, and yet it became the central expression of God’s power and wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18–25). Hence, Paul’s own imprisonment could hardly thwart his commission to let the secret out of the bag, to get out the good news of God’s reconciliation in Christ (cf. Eph. 3).

The message to the readers is clear: their own vulnerability likewise does not disqualify them from inhabiting the armor of God and the task it implies. In doing so, they imitate their great apostle Paul, who amid great suffering and calamities nevertheless wielded the “weapons of righteousness” with endurance and love for his churches (2 Cor. 6:1–13).

In 6:20 we thus see one more instance of the profound irony that informed Paul’s apostolic ministry, here expressed in the image of the bound messenger, the *ambassador in chains*. The heroic status of Paul, as observed in chapter 3, is exploited for all its motivational force, in a way highly reminiscent of Paul himself, who time and again was prepared to place himself in a subservient position in relation to his churches. Notice, for example, how often he asks for prayer in his letters (e.g., Rom. 15:30–32; Phil. 1:19; 1 Thess. 5:25). Here in Ephesians, while Paul is in chains, the saints are in the armor of the divine warrior. Their prayers are a plea for God to embolden the chained ambassador, to free his mouth even as his body is in chains. The prayers are also a way of coming to Paul’s aid. One might even say that the act of writing in his name is a way of answering that prayer.

The image of the armed struggle against the powers thus ends on a strong note of mutuality: Paul serves as a model who puts the welfare of *all the saints* before his own. Deference to the needs of others and respect for *all the saints* are two of the strange weapons wielded in imitation of God and his Messiah. Strange warfare, indeed! However, it is lethal from the vantage point of *the powers*, who find nothing as threatening as a prayerful community exercising truth, justice, peace, and a courageous speaking of the word of God, thus announcing the good news that enmity is dead!

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The Divine Warrior

Ephesians 6:10–20 is one of many texts in the Bible that deal with divine warfare (e.g., Exod. 14–15; Deut. 32–33; Pss. 18; 68; Isa. 59; 63; Hab. 3; among Mennonite writers, cf. Ted Hiebert;

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Waldemar Janzen; Millard Lind; Ben Ollenburger; Devon Wiens; Yoder Neufeld). The image of God as warrior is one of the primal metaphors in the Bible, in the OT and the NT.

One of the oldest songs recorded in biblical literature, the song of Miriam and Moses in Exodus 15, celebrates the LORD as a mighty warrior who has driven horse and chariot into the sea (15:1, 21). This image of God underwent some radical changes over the centuries. The most dramatic was the prophetic insight that the people of Israel could not count on God's warring on their behalf against their enemies unless they lived true to their covenant with God. Instead, God could be expected to go to war against them (e.g., Isa. 29:3–10; Jer. 21:3–9; 29:16–19). The warrior became judge and executioner of Israel's enemies (e.g., Isa. 13) and also of Israel.

God could use natural disasters to fight his enemies (e.g., Exod. 15; Deut. 32; 2 Sam. 22:9–16//Ps. 18:8–15; Ps. 77:16–18). God could surround himself with allies such as the tribes of Israel, the hated Assyrians or Babylonians, and the armies of heaven or, as they are frequently called, the "heavenly hosts." Typical of apocalyptic literature generally, the Revelation of John illustrates dramatically how this imagery lent itself to picturing God as judge and liberator on a cosmic scale.

At the root of this tradition lies the conviction that ultimately God alone is the warrior. Victory is God's and God's alone. One important way this finds expression is in the command for the people to stand and watch the LORD act on their behalf, as at the Red Sea in Exodus 14:13–14. Even when the people come "to the help of the LORD" ("YHWH," Judg. 5:23), as is more commonly the case, the battle and the victory are always God's.

Isaiah 59 and Its Offspring

The specific tradition of the divine warrior that the author takes up begins with Isaiah 59 and continues through the Wisdom of Solomon 5 and 1 Thessalonians 5. It shows the prophetic transformation of the motif, but also the more radical changes Paul has introduced.

Isaiah 59 pictures God as infuriated at the violence and oppression that marks Israelite existence. There is no one to see that justice is done, so God puts on the divine armor and brings judgment on the violators of the covenant and liberation for the faithful. The armor is thus a symbol of judgment as much or more than it is of liberation. Wisdom of Solomon 5 takes up the Isaianic motif and interprets it from within the same frame of thinking. God puts on the armor to vindicate the just by bringing down their oppressors.

Wisdom of Solomon may have been written as late as the time of Paul's ministry. This only increases our wonder at Paul's radical reinterpretation of Isaiah 59 in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Into a world marked by darkness, drunkenness, sleep, and a fatefully mistaken sense of security, the "day of the Lord" comes like "a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2). The images are threatening and are intended to be so. But a surprise awaits. Who is in the divine armor? Weak and suffering believers! And what are they wielding in their struggle? Faith, love, and the hope of salvation!

To be sure, Paul does not for a moment abandon the conviction that God will judge the cosmos and all its inhabitants, as 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 2:14 clearly show. Yet, at the heart of Paul's gospel is also the conviction that the God before whose holiness and justice we all "fall short" (Rom. 3:23), the same God, surprises the world with grace. Indeed, the desire to surprise with grace is the fullest expression of God's justice (cf. Rom. 5).

First Thessalonians 5:1–11 is an instance of that good news. Like a thief in the night, the divine warrior surprises those sitting in darkness, but the warrior is in the form of a community that

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practices faith, hope, and love (5:8). The *day of the Lord* becomes once again a day of *salvation*. Amos' terrible irony of day becoming night (5:18, 20) has been reversed: night has turned into day (Elias: 197–9; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:73–93).

Ephesians builds on that transformation. Notice, for example, the act of turning darkness into light through exposing the darkness for what it is (Eph. 5:11). At the same time, Ephesians 6:10–20 does not simply imitate 1 Thessalonians 5, even if both texts express the conviction that the community of believers has been drawn into the activity of the divine warrior. In Ephesians, the adversary has changed. In effect, the church as Christ's body is now implicated in Christ's reign, marked by warfare with the powers (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–28).

We can more fully appreciate the distinctive way Ephesians treats the tradition of God's armor by placing the contents of the armor in these related texts side by side.

The Armor of God

<i>Isa. 59:17</i>	<i>Wisd. of Sol. 5:17–1</i>	<i>Thess. 5:8</i>	<i>Eph. 6:14–17</i>
	20a		
	panoply or whole armor		panoply or whole armor
			girdle of truth
breastplate of righteousness/justice	of breastplate of righteousness/justice	of breastplate of faith and love	breastplate of righteousness/justice
			shoes of the runner of peace
			shield of faith or faithfulness
helmet of salvation	helmet of justice	of impartial salvation	helmet of salvation
	sword of stern wrath		sword of the Spirit, the word of God
clothed with the garments of vengeance and wrath			
(next, in 59:19, natural phenomena: creation as ally in wind, river)	(next, in 5:20b–23, warfare: lightning, hail, sea, rivers, wind)		

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In comparing the elements of armor, we observe a great deal of both continuity and creativity in how the biblical writers adapt the motif. *Helmet* and *breastplate* are the most consistent elements. Wisdom of Solomon compares *righteousness/justice* to a breastplate, and a close parallel, *impartial justice*, to a helmet. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul overlays the helmet and breastplate with his favorite triad of virtues: *faith, love, and hope*. It may be that he sees faith and love as another way of expressing God's righteousness/justice (cf. Rom. 5:8, 18). Ephesians returns to the Isaianic original with *the breastplate of righteousness/justice* and *the helmet of salvation*. At the same time, we are struck by the creativity with which the author expands the image.

We must keep this long tradition in view so we can appreciate the shock early readers and hearers of this letter would have experienced at the summons for them to put on *God's* armor. Ephesians calls them to enter the battle against the spiritual powers of darkness in the heavenlies. It is true that this is *God's* battle and *God's* victory; it is also true that the *saints* are drawn into the struggle of God for the sake of the cosmos.

Are the Powers All Bad?

The depiction of the powers in 6:12 is sharply negative. The overarching image of warfare leads of course to seeing them as such. But in the NT, the powers are not uniformly evil [*Powers*]. Colossians 1:16 credits Christ with having created them! At present, however, they are clearly viewed in Ephesians as hostile (cf. 2:2), even if 2:7 and 3:10 might allow for the future reconciliation of the powers in some sense, perhaps as part of the *ingathering of all things* (1:10). For the most part, the depiction is decidedly negative.

The writer of Ephesians was specifically concerned to impress on readers the gravity of the struggle toward pacification of the cosmos. That objective alone governs the depiction of the powers. Within the frame of the argument in Ephesians, the anticipated fate of the powers is defeat (cf. 1:20–22). Ephesians is silent on whether that means their elimination or whether there is to be restoration beyond defeat.

Baptism and Putting on the Armor of God

In Pauline letters, “taking off” and “putting on” are favorite ways to represent the transformation of believers in baptism (e.g., Rom. 13:12, 14; Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:8–12). It is widely thought that this language reflects the actual ritual of baptism, where those to be baptized took off their old clothes, were baptized, and then received new clothes reflecting the new life in Christ (Meeks: 150–7). We have already noted that according to 4:22–24 believers were taught to *take off ... the old human*, and *put on the new human* (cf. Col. 3:5–11; E. Martin: 147–65).

The identity of the *new human* has already been established in 2:15 as Christ himself, albeit in the form of reconciled humanity. In baptism, believers are incorporated into that body and person of Christ (Gal. 3:27). They “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ, as Romans 13:14 states it.

Romans 13:12–14, however, also draws a close connection between putting on Christ in baptism and putting on armor: “Take off the works of darkness and put on the weapons of light, since the night is far gone and the day is at hand” (v. 12, TRYN). This is highly reminiscent of 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, but also of baptism as preparedness for battle in Romans 6:1–14. There the baptized are exhorted not to present their members to sin as “weapons of injustice,” but

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rather to present their members to God as “weapons of justice” (6:13, TRYN; NIV and NRSV translate rather weakly “instruments of wickedness” and “instruments of righteousness”).

Ephesians 6:10–20 draws heavily on this connection (so also, e.g., Gnika: 310). Putting on *the new human*, the *body* of Christ, is identification with the task of Christ. That means putting on the armor of God and entering the fray of messianic battle with the powers, exercising truth, justice, peace, faithfulness, liberation, and the word of God with prayerful vigilance and discipline. Baptism is a ritual of enlistment as much as it is identification with the death and resurrection of Christ—or better, because of this identification.

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The Language of Violence

These verses are clearly meant to challenge and encourage the church to courageous engagement with the powers that resist God’s peace. They have provided great encouragement and motivation for peacemakers (as illustrated repeatedly by e-mail dispatches from Christian Peacemaker Teams [CPT]). Sadly, they have also provided encouragement for a crusade mentality that has left countless victims in its wake. The certainty of being right and of doing the work of God, when fused with a view of the other as enemy, has led to arrogance and blindness, often to great violence (Volf: 57–98, with insightful discussion of “exclusion”).

Questions are increasingly raised, especially among Christians dedicated to peacemaking, about the acceptability of militaristic language, even when it is highly metaphorical and even when it is derived from the Bible (e.g., Russell, 1984:122). Some who have been close to war feel deep revulsion at the vocabulary of violence, especially when employed as a positive metaphor.

In addition to the issue of glorifying violence, does such language paint reality too much as parties/dimensions “over against” each other and thereby crowd out other paradigms of change? Does it create and nourish a mentality that sees violent struggle, however spiritually redefined, as the only way to salvation?

While acknowledging the importance of these questions, we need to recall that the author of Ephesians uses other even more powerful ways to reflect on God’s great program of making peace with the cosmos and its inhabitants (e.g., gathering, 1:10; re-creating, 2:10, 15; dying *for* 2:15–16; 5:2). This particular text forces the church to deal with whether there is something in the very way *the powers* relate to human life (cf. 2:2; 6:11) that requires vigilance, empowerment, and struggle, expressed here in the language of battle and warfare.

The interpretation of Ephesians offered in this commentary sees militarism, indeed enmity itself (cf. 2:16), as one of the powers that must be resisted and overcome. Warfare language then becomes both fitting and highly ironic. The persistence of organized, culturally nurtured enmity, oppression, and alienation is so strong in our world that it becomes necessary to conceive of the struggle against these as battle with *the powers*. This battle requires all of the divine empowerment and armor that God places at the church’s disposal. Our critical and *essential* task is to maintain the irony in such warfare, however, and to remain deeply conscious that this is always a battle *for blood and flesh* and *never against blood and flesh*. The history of the church tells us that this is just as difficult as it is urgent.

We might add that the words in Ephesians 6:10–20 sound one way when spoken with resilient hope and even spiritual bravado by a tiny and outnumbered minority, perhaps oppressed and seemingly powerless. The same words sound quite different when wielded by a church wedded

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to institutions and systems of power and control. In such a context, the irony cannot help but disappear and give way to literal warfare—religious, psychological, and/or physical. Then the mystery of the gospel is not revealed (6:19; cf. 3:10) but is fatally obscured. The gospel of peace is stifled, not proclaimed (6:15). The heart of the gospel is betrayed, the Spirit is grieved (4:30).

For this text and its imagery to be good news for us and our world, it matters absolutely who we are as readers and what our allegiances are. We must ask, for example, whether this metaphor of God’s armor, however truthful, is appropriate for a “Christian” imagination that has been deeply militarized and is thus incapable of seeing its irony. The writer of Ephesians would no doubt bless any attempt to find more-fitting metaphors than those of warfare, but only if they could nurture the alertness, resilience, confidence, and identification with God as well as this metaphor did in its day (cf. Bergant: 102).

Are the Powers “Real”?

Does the language of *the powers* mesh with how Christians view reality today? Remarkably it does, if for very different reasons. Many, not only beyond the shores of the highly secularized and “demystified” West, have a lively sense of evil or demonic forces wreaking havoc in the lives of people. For them “spiritual warfare” is an experiential reality for which this text supplies profound encouragement [*Powers*]. Such Christians know prayer as battle (e.g., Warner, 1991:133–43).

Sadly, Christians with this perspective of spiritual warfare are often remarkably indifferent or even hostile to dealing with issues of systemic, structural, social, political, and cultural evil such as economic disparities and exploitation, nationalism, militarism, racism, and sexism. In many cases, they may even ally themselves with those very powers of oppression. This passage challenges such believers to see spiritual warfare as an often painstakingly ordinary, everyday struggle for peace, justice, truth, and liberation in human relationships, small and great.

Others view human life as affected much more devastatingly by social, political, and economic forces. Ephesians 6 offers support for their concerns as well. Since the view of salvation in Ephesians is as comprehensive as the cosmos and *all things* within it (1:10), then the view of the powers should encompass the full dimensions of opposition to that salvation [*Powers*].

As stated above, the view of demonic forces affecting persons is vulnerable to underestimating broad-ranging opposition to God’s efforts at peacemaking. Likewise, however, a view of the demonic restricted to influences on institutions in society is just as vulnerable to underestimating how individual persons may be bound (e.g., Luke 13:16). Our text challenges Christians to recognize the “spiritual” factors at the root of militarism, racism, and sexism. It tells us that believers require divine empowerment in the costly struggle for justice and peace. *The powers* will never be fully understood let alone overcome by human beings left to their own devices. That is why the struggle against them must be accompanied and sustained by the vigilant exercise of prayer for power, courage, and insight (Ellul; McClain; Wink [*Powers*]).

In the end, whatever the metaphors, whatever the imagery, and whatever the contexts of struggle, it is *God’s* power at work in the community of saints that enables them to participate in the *gathering up of all things in Christ* (1:10).

Resistance or Nonresistance?

The tradition of the divine warrior influencing this text presents an important challenge to churches with a commitment to nonresistance and nonviolence. As mentioned earlier, a strand

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in the Bible stresses quite strongly that *God* is the one who sees to it that justice is assured and evil defeated (e.g., Rom. 12:19). In line with this, the only appropriate stance of human beings is one of patient and quiet dependency on God—*nonresistance* (cf. the paradigmatic role of Exod. 14:13–14 in Lind’s work; Matt. 5:39, “Do not resist an evildoer,” has led to the term *nonresistance*).

This is an important strand, and peace churches have mined this lode well. Such a “quiet” stance can itself, of course, be a form of resistance to the powers (Berkhof: 50–2; J. H. Yoder, 1994:147–53). Yet it must be acknowledged that along with fostering great courage in the face of overwhelming hostility, nonresistance has also often led to disengagement from the world.

As we have seen, the understanding of the church in Ephesians, even if taken by itself, leaves little room for disengagement. The church is one flesh with the Christ through whom God is reconciling the world to himself (2:14–17; 5:29–32; 2 Cor. 5:19). In other words, believers are not so much *dependents* as *participants* in the messianic task. If the powers are to be vanquished, it is not enough for the church simply *to be* a church keeping to itself. The church’s true existence consists of the active and bold actualization of gospel truth, justice, peace, and liberation in human relationships (cf. 3:10; 5:11; 6:20; Berkhof: 51–2; J. H. Yoder, 1994:147–9; yet Berkhof and Yoder downplay the offensive nature of the church’s struggle much more than does Ephesians). Here at the end of the letter, Ephesians draws the church into the role of the one who intervenes—the divine warrior.

This passage and, indeed, the letter as a whole provide the basis for a courageous engagement with all the powers—spiritual, personal, impersonal, political, social, cultural, and economic—that resist the reconciliation of *all people* and *all things* to God. Indeed, it makes such engagement the litmus test of being *in Christ*. It is absolutely important that those who are so engaged do so as members of the Christ whose own engagement took the form of dying *for* his enemies and of creating a new humanity out of those enemies (2:11–22). Such radical self-giving *kills* the enmity (2:15); that peaceableness represents a frontal assault on the powers. The double implication in the image of the divine armor of protection and summons to struggle is captured well in the 1708 *Prayer Book for Earnest Christians*, read widely in Amish and Mennonite circles:

Clothe us now, O Father! with the armor of your divine strength, so we may withstand the deceitful advances of the evil enemy, who fights against truth. Give us the shield of true faith, to maintain victory over all that may hinder us from experiencing your righteousness. Place on our heads the helmet of your salvation, that we need not fear any human being, who withers like the grass. Instead, may we fear you, O Lord, since you search out human hearts and test our inner being.

So now place into our hearts the sword of your Holy Spirit, which is your holy Word and Spirit. Thus may we stand firmly for your holy name and fight for the truth up to the time of our blessed end. (Gross: 55–6)

Baptism as Enlistment

The relationship of putting on the armor and baptism is of great relevance to the understanding and practice of baptism in the believers church. In that tradition, baptism ideally follows a mature decision to follow Christ and to take on the responsibilities of membership in the church. At the same time, in many such churches, baptism has become a rite of *conformity* to the expectations of the immediate culture—family and congregation.

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Insofar as the summons to *put on the armor of God* is parallel to the call to *put on the new human* (4:24), none other than the “Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:12, 14), our text is a forceful reminder that baptism is a rite of enlistment into the messianic community. It is at the same time a ritual of empowerment for the messianic task.

Even though he was writing in a context of suffering and oppression (cf. “The Cross of the Saints” [1554], Menno: 599–600), Menno Simons knew that baptism necessarily implicates believers in active struggle against *the powers*:

Against [those who have put on Christ in baptism,] the devil and his accomplices, such as the world and the flesh, being very envious, have declared war and have become their deadly enemies. The regenerate in turn have now become enemies of sin and the devil and have taken the field against all their enemies with the Author and finisher of their faith, under the banner of the crimson cross, armed with the armor of God, surrounded with angels of the Lord, and always watching with great solicitude lest they be overcome by their enemies who never slumber, but go about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour, hurt, and harm. (“The Spiritual Resurrection” [1536], Menno: 56–7; italics added; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8, “like a roaring lion”)

Let me say it once more. Do battle! The crown of glory is prepared for you! Shrink not, neither draw back! (“The Cross of the Saints,” Menno: 622; cf. 1 Pet. 5:4, “crown of glory”)

Ephesians 6:10–20 is therefore one more reminder, along with Romans 6 and 13:11–14, of how important it is that baptism be undertaken by those who can appreciate the task and count the cost of being Christian.

Ephesians 6:21–24

Closing Comments and Benediction

PREVIEW

The letter to the Ephesians ends on a personal note and a forceful benediction laden to overflowing with theological freight. This postscript conforms generally to other letters in the Pauline correspondence [*Pauline Letter Structure*] and, indeed, to general letter-writing etiquette in the first century. It contains mention of circumstances, persons, and delivery of correspondence, but also a concluding benediction. Close affinity with Colossians 4:7–8 hints at the strong possibility that the “personal” tone may be more literary than relational.

Tychicus is identified as the bearer of the letter. In addition to delivering the letter, it is his task to strengthen the link between Paul and the recipients of the letter. He is commended as a reliable letter carrier, who can be trusted to give an accurate picture of Paul’s circumstances. In addition, he can take news to Paul about the readers’ state of affairs and, equally important, strengthen and encourage the recipients of the letter. In effect, Tychicus can act in Paul’s stead. The letter concludes with a benediction or blessing of *peace* and *grace* that echoes the greeting of *grace* and *peace* at the beginning of the letter (1:2).

The presence of *peace* and *grace* at the beginning and at the end of this letter is a fitting frame for the sustained and profound consideration of the peacemaking grace of God that constitutes the heart of this letter.

OUTLINE

The Mission of Tychicus, 6:21–22

Closing Benediction, 6:23–24

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EXPLANATORY NOTES

The Mission of Tychicus 6:21–22

Verses 21–22 highlight the role of Tychicus in bearing this letter to the recipients. Formally, this is a note of recommendation for the letter carrier. In addition, Tychicus can be trusted to give a full account of Paul's circumstances, presumably also about his imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Paul also trusts him to gather information from the believers, to encourage their hearts, and to strengthen them in their daunting task. In short, the mission of Tychicus is part of the long reach of Paul's apostolic activity—both Paul's use of apostolic letters and of emissaries.

We know little about Tychicus. He was from Asia (Acts 20:4), he was part of the circle around Paul (Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12), and he had some connection with Ephesus (Acts 20:4; 2 Tim. 4:12; this may account for the association of this letter with Ephesus; 1:1–2, notes). We should thus think of Tychicus as one of Paul's trusted inner circle of co-workers, a *beloved brother and faithful servant (diakonos) in the Lord*.

Several questions emerge, however, in a careful reading of these verses. The wording is virtually identical to Colossians 4:7–8, making literary dependency of Ephesians on Colossians virtually certain (Introduction). In particular, compare Ephesians 6:21–22 with Colossians 4:7–8 (here rendered very literally to make comparison easier; italics show wording unique to each letter).

Ephesians 6:21–22

In order that you yourselves also may know about me, what I am doing—everything will make known to you Tychicus, beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, whom I sent to you for this very purpose, so that you might know things concerning us, and that he might encourage your hearts.

Colossians 4:7–8

Everything about me will make known to you Tychicus, beloved brother and faithful servant *and fellow slave* in the Lord, whom I sent to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he might encourage your hearts.

The fact that the wording in Ephesians is for all practical purposes identical to Colossians 4:7–8 suggests close literary dependence on that earlier letter (Introduction).

Second, if Paul is the author, the absence of greetings as we find them in the Colossians parallel is puzzling, especially since Paul worked in Ephesus for several years. As much as any verses in Ephesians, these two raise the strong possibility that this letter was written by one of Paul's followers (so most commentators, including Lincoln: 462; R. Martin, 1991:78; Perkins: 151; Schnackenburg: 286–7; in contrast, see Barth, 1974:810; Best, 1998:612–4 agrees that the author was not Paul but thinks it more likely that the author of Colossians borrowed from Ephesians).

Somewhat fancifully and ingeniously, it has been proposed that Tychicus tips his hand as the actual author of this letter by borrowing Paul's commendation of him from Colossians and retaining the first person plural in Ephesians 6:22. Thereby he would include himself in a letter that hitherto has focused solely on Paul (e.g., Mitton, 1951:268).

In my view, the evidence does point to the authorship of someone other than Paul. What is striking, even so, is that despite the fact that Paul has become the central revered apostolic figure for the community out of which the letter emerged and for which it was intended, a true

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reflection of the great apostle must acknowledge that he did not work alone. Other *faithful servants* extended the reach of his apostolic mission. They did so during his lifetime; observe the multiple authorship of his letters as well as the extensive greetings at the conclusion of his letters (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:1; Rom. 16). And, if I and many other scholars are correct about the pseudepigraphical nature of this letter, faithful co-workers extended Paul's ministry even after his death.

Regardless of whether Tychicus carried Paul's letter to Ephesus, or whether "Tychicus" carried "Paul's" letter to various churches, the indisputable result has indeed been that countless *hearts* have been *encouraged* by it toward greater faithfulness.

Closing Benediction 6:23–24

Three things strike a careful reader of the two concluding verses. One is that Ephesians stands alone among Pauline letters in offering the closing benediction in the third person rather than in the customary second person plural. The second is the rich and luminous verbosity we have come to expect of this author. Third is the both tantalizing and puzzling final stress on incorruptibility.

First, the personal tone of 6:21–22 gives way to the indirect and thus less personal blessing of *the brothers and sisters* and *all who love our Lord Jesus Christ*. *Brothers* (NIV) by itself does not capture the inclusiveness intended by the Greek *adelphoi*. While this is the only place where the familial *brothers and sisters* is used in Ephesians, it is not used as a form of direct address as is usual in Paul's writings. Might this be an indication that the letter was meant from the outset to be read by a wider circle of churches? (so, e.g., Lincoln: 465; Perkins: 151). Whether or not this benediction is more "aloof" (Barth, 1974:815), addressing the readers as *brothers and sisters* is in keeping with the weight given the motif of *family* in this letter (see esp. 2:11–22; 3:14; NRSV's *whole community*, while intending to be inclusive, obscures this connection).

Further, the offer of *grace* to those who *love our Lord Jesus Christ* mirrors perfectly the essential structure of the letter. The first half of Ephesians is a rich tableau of God's grace at work. It is followed by an equally profound exploration of what responsive love looks like in the community of believers. God's grace and human love and faithfulness are indissoluble (cf. Rom. 5–6).

Second, this concluding blessing distinguishes itself by the richness of its vocabulary. The offer of *peace* here is unique in the Pauline correspondence, indicating the importance placed on peace in this letter (esp. 2:11–22). In the closing comments of other Pauline letters, *peace* is either related specifically to "the God of peace" (Rom. 15:33; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16), referred to less directly (2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 6:16), or missing (1 Cor., Phil., Col., 1 and 2 Tim., Titus, Philem.). Here the double benediction of *peace* and *grace* deliberately echoes the opening greeting in 1:2. It is no doubt intended to frame the letter as a whole. As our exploration throughout this commentary has shown, Ephesians is one long extended consideration of God's gracious peacemaking in Christ and the life of faithfulness that this peaceable grace has made possible.

Consistent with this emphasis on *peace*, the author adds *love with faith* (NIV, NRSV) to his wish list for the readers. Both *love (agapē)* and *faith (pistis)* have been given great depth in the letter; they also appear together in 1:15 and 3:17. *Love* motivates God's gracious actions toward the human community (1:4; 2:4; 3:17, 19). But *love* also marks the stance and behavior of those who have been saved by that divine love (esp. 4:2, 15–16; 5:2, 25; and not least, 6:24). I have

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repeatedly explored the importance of understanding *faith* both as *trust* and as *faithfulness*, as “love in action” (notes on 2:8; 3:12; 6:16).

The distinctive phrase *love with faith (fulness)* reminds us of the terse assertion in James that *faith without works is dead* (2:17, 26). By alerting readers to this connection in the context of the benediction, the author reasserts an essential Pauline insight that comes to expression in 2:10: human *love* and *faithfulness—good works*—are nothing other than a gift of God (so also Barth, 1974:811).

The second part of the benediction in verse 24 reflects the insight that just as *love* and *faith (fulness)* are an essential part of God’s offer of *peace* (6:23), *grace* too is inseparable from deliberate acts of *love* on the part of those who have been graced. *Grace* is with those who *love our Lord Jesus Christ*. This benediction has a negative counterpart in 1 Corinthians 16:22: “Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord” (NRSV). We also recall that immediately after the invitation in Ephesians 5:2 to love as Christ loved, we find a sharp reminder that those who do not so *walk* will not enjoy any inheritance in the *kingdom of Christ and of God* (5:5). Even so, however much we sense an implicit warning in this offer of grace, what is stressed is that God’s *peace* and *grace* precede and undergird human exercise of *love* and *faith (fulness)*.

Finally, we consider the last phrase, *in incorruptibility (en aphtharsia)*. *Aphtharsia* means “imperishable,” “incorruptible,” or “immortal.” In Pauline writings it usually refers to the resurrection life (e.g., Rom. 2:7; esp. 1 Cor. 15:42, 50–54). But what does it qualify in this sentence? Is God’s *grace* without end or limit (e.g., Gniska: 325)? Is our *love* for Christ to be “unending” (so NIV, NRSV, NASB, REB; Best, 1998:620)? Does *Christ* live “eternally in the heavenlies” (R. Martin, 1991:79)?

In my view, it is wrong to make a choice. As so often in the analysis of this letter, we are tempted to resolve grammatical ambiguities rather than respect and relish the multiplicity of interpretive possibilities such ambiguity invites. *In incorruptibility* is a “rhetorical flourish” (Lincoln: 466) intended to place the *whole* of God’s interaction with redeemed humanity into the context of hope and permanence—a fitting benediction indeed:

Imperishable grace be with all whose love for the immortal Lord knows no end! AMEN!¹³

¹³ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 226–321). Herald Press.

CHILDREN: OBEDIENCE: DO IT GOD'S WAY

Children are to obey both their parents. This relationship exists “in the Lord,” and the implication is that children and parents live under the authority of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:1). Children cannot be subject to their parents in a way that is contrary to the obedience they owe to Jesus Christ. They should obey their parents because this is “right” in God’s eyes, as illustrated by the fourth Commandment (vv. 1, 2). A child’s education would typically include the Ten Commandments; so Paul is drawing attention to truth children would already know. The word “honor” includes the ideas of respect and esteem (v. 2). Life lived in submission to legitimate authority would benefit the child with a better and longer life (v. 3; see Deut 5:16). The term “father” can be used to represent both parents (see similar usage in Heb. 11:23). Unreasonable demands by parents will provoke children to anger and can push them to perpetual bitterness with the result that children lose hope of ever performing well enough to please (Col 3:21). Parents should instead rear their children in an atmosphere of nurturing: godly training in what is right, correction of what is wrong, and encouragement at every turn.

See also chart on The Ten Commandments Throughout Scripture; notes on Children (Ps. 128); Parenthood (Prov. 10)

5:18 The command to be filled applies to all believers. The passive voice of the verb indicates that this is not a manufactured experience; the Holy Spirit fills and controls them. Further, the present tense of the command indicates that there can be many, successive fillings. This filling is not to be confused with the “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurs at the point of conversion.

5:19–21 As a result of the Spirit’s filling, believers will communicate with one another in an edifying manner. The Greek verb used includes all sorts of speech—singing of “psalms” (OT psalms), “hymns” (praises composed by Christians), and “spiritual songs” (spontaneous, Spirit-inspired praise). Second, they will sing praises to the Lord (see chart, Hymns and Songs Associated with Women). Third, they will continually give thanks to the Father (Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Fourth, they will mutually submit to one another.

5:22–6:9 As Paul elaborated on the subject of submission, he showed what would happen in specific relationships within the family (see 1 Pet. 3, Submission; charts, Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission).

5:22–24 The exhortation specifies that wives are to submit themselves to their “own” husbands (v. 22). Paul in no way suggests that wives are inferior to their husbands or that they, as women, must submit to all other men. The wife’s submission is voluntary rather than forced (v. 22). God does not ask a wife to submit herself to her husband in violation of her Christian

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responsibility to walk in holiness and righteousness before Him. The marriage relationship is raised to lofty heights as Paul compared it to the relationship of Christ and His church (v. 23). The husband is not the Savior of the wife's body. Nevertheless, the analogy holds that the husband is to be the protector of his wife (see Gen. 2:15–17, note). In voluntary submission, the wife can serve her husband, just as the church serves Christ, with freedom and dignity.

ROLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Original Relationship: Creation	Distortion of the Relationship: The Fall	Restoration of the Relationship: Redemption
Man and woman are perfectly related to one another and to God (Gen. 2:25).	The relationship between the man and the woman and their relationship to God are distorted by the presence of sin (Gen. 3:7, 8).	Jesus Christ as Redeemer models both servant leadership for the man and selfless submission for the woman (Eph. 5:23–27; Phil. 2:5–8).

According to the egalitarian position, no difference existed between the man and the woman prior to the Fall. They were equal in personhood (as is also true in the complementarian position) and the same in role and function (while the complementarian position maintains a difference in role assignment for the man and for the woman).

See also Gen. 1:26; 2:24; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22–24, 25–31, notes; notes on Headship (Gen. 1); The Creation of the Woman (Gen. 2); Complementarity (Eph. 5); Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

5:25–31 Paul's exhortation is equally clear to husbands: They are to love their wives (an admonition expressed six times in vv. 25–33) in the same manner in which Christ sacrificially loved the church (v. 25). Husbands must not be "bitter" or harsh with their wives (Col. 3:19). Christ's love for His church is presently manifested in His work of atonement (Eph. 5:25) and sanctification (v. 26) so that He might in the end times present her as a pure and spotless bride (v. 27). Returning to the marriage relationship, Paul explained that the husband should love his wife as his own body because the two are actually one (v. 28; see Gen. 2:24). "Body" is used here, as elsewhere, to refer to the whole person (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 1:20). God prescribed that marriage provide a picture of the ultimate and eternal love between Christ and His church.

5:33 Paul summarized by reminding each husband to love his own wife sacrificially as himself and by reminding each wife to show respect to her husband as the God-ordained leader of the family "as to the Lord" (v. 22; see charts, Role Relationship Between Men and Women; Theological Foundation for Headship).

CAN THIS BE? EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT? ISN'T EQUAL JUST THAT? DOES THE WORD DIFFERENT SUGGEST...LEVELS?

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COMPLEMENTARITY: *EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT*

Male and female were created as equal and complementary expressions of the image of God. Both bear His image fully, though in different ways. Their different roles in relationship to each other provide a picture of who God is and how He relates to His people.

Christ Jesus is equal with God the Father, yet submissive and responsive to Him (Phil. 2:6–8). God the Father loves the Son and exalts Him. The pattern is repeated in the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ provides loving, servant leadership; the church responds with respect and submission as Christ’s “Bride” (Eph. 5:22–33). Another counterpart to the picture is the relationship between church leaders and local bodies of believers (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Sin has distorted the relationship between man and woman at every level, but believers are called to relate according to the Creator’s plan instituted in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world (Gen. 2:15–25). This plan is marked by a holy reciprocity in which the husband’s loving headship awakens a responsive submission from the wife just as a wife’s submissive cooperation draws from her husband sensitive leadership. The realities of headship and submission are to be enacted within loving, equal, complementary male-female roles. In this, the image of God is properly reflected.

See also Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; charts on Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission; notes on Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

FATHERHOOD: *PROTECTOR AND PROVIDER*

The earliest concept of God for a child is greatly impacted by the relationship she has with her own father. Fathers in the Bible were the supreme authoritative figures in their families. With but a word they could determine the fate of their offspring. In contrast to this autocratic image of fatherhood, Paul’s advice to fathers emphasizes patience (Eph. 6:4). The father Jesus describes, just as our heavenly Father, loves unconditionally, forgives without strings attached, and gives abundantly (Luke 15:11–32). Still, Scripture presents a tender side to fatherhood: A temple official came to Jesus frantic for his daughter’s healing

(Matt. 9:18–26); Jacob and David displayed deep sorrow at the loss of their sons (Gen. 37:33–35; 2 Sam. 13:35–39); both¹⁴

Ephesians 5:18

5:18 The tense of the Greek for **be filled** makes clear that such a Spirit-filled condition does not stop with a single experience, but is maintained by “continually being filled,” as commanded here.¹⁵

Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.

18 *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, NKJV*

¹⁴ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [The Woman’s Study Bible](#) (Eph 3:1–5:33). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.

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FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS: A QUALITY PRECIOUS TO GOD

Those who walk in the Spirit possess a quality of gentleness that is one of the hallmarks necessary for Christian unity. Paul challenges believers to a life worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus that is characterized by lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, mutual forbearance, and peace (Eph. 4:1–3).

“Gentleness” or “meekness” (Gk. *praut s*) refers to a humble, submissive attitude that is the opposite of pride. Not to be confused with weakness, gentleness is strength that is submitted to God and channeled into service to others. The Old Testament characterizes God as gentle (2 Sam. 22:36; Ps. 18:35). The New Testament describes Jesus as “gentle and lowly [humble] in heart” (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Believers, like their Lord, should pursue gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11) and wear it like a garment (Col. 3:12).

The godly virtue of gentleness, which is a quality of the heart, is counted as being more influential than outward beauty in winning an unbelieving husband to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1–4). A gentle spirit is precious to God. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit necessary for godliness (holy, Christlike living), goodness (kindness toward others), and giftedness (service in the name of Jesus).

See also notes on Encouragement (Eph. 4); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Humility (Phil. 2); Submission (1 Pet. 3); Wives (Prov. 31)

Women in the Early Church

Attitudes toward women in the 1st-century church were heavily influenced by two major sources—the history of Judaism and the example of Jesus. Jewish Christians knew, and Gentile Christians were quickly taught, the major themes of the Old Testament. On the one hand, God had created man and woman alike in his image to rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26–31) and had created Eve to be a suitable helper for Adam (2:18), an expression that suggests equality more than subordination. On the other hand, the first couple fell into sin, after which God promised the woman, “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (3:16). No debate surrounds the fact

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that after this point gender relations throughout the Old Testament were highly patriarchal.

But Jesus came to reverse the effects of the fall, and his teaching and example regularly challenged the conventions that had come to characterize 1st-century Judaism. He regularly treated women with a dignity that surprised or upset men in his culture. Perhaps the two most dramatic examples involved his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42) and his acceptance of Mary of Bethany in the role of a rabbi's disciple (Luke 10:38–42). Jesus risked the perception of scandal by allowing women to travel with him and his disciples (and to support them financially; Luke 8:1–3), and one of these, Mary Magdalene, formerly demon-possessed, became the first witness to the resurrection and an “apostle to the apostles” (John 20:1–2, 18). Still, Jesus did not choose a woman among his 12 closest followers, though the significance of this observation remains disputed.

The book of Acts contains no instructions regarding gender roles, but it does present a significant number of examples of women in prominent positions. Women as well as men prophesy (Acts 2:17–21), Priscilla (with her husband Aquila) teaches Apollos “the Way of God more accurately” (18:26), and Paul is willing to preach to an all-female assembly, from which the first European convert, Lydia, emerges (17:11–15). From the epistles we learn of numerous other prominent women leaders in the church and coworkers with Paul during this first Christian generation: Phoebe is a deacon and a patron (Rom. 16:1–2); Junia is an apostle, in the broader sense of missionary or church planter (v. 7); Chloe and Nympha and their (apparently fatherless) households figure prominently (1 Cor. 1:11; Col. 4:15); and Euodia, Syntyche, and others are fellow laborers in the gospel whom Paul values (Phil. 4:2–3; cf. Rom. 16:6, 12).

Mosaic of Saint Perpetua from the Euphrasius basilica in Pored, Croatia.

(Wikimedia Commons)

Paul does continue to command women to submit to their husbands, not simply as a vestige of the old order but comparable to the church's submission to Christ (Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18). But he also commands mutual submission (Eph. 5:21) and radically redefines male authority as not greater privilege but greater responsibility (vv. 25–33). The most probable interpretation of Peter's reference to married women as “weaker vessels” (1 Pet. 3:7) highlights their greater vulnerability in their voluntarily adopted role of subordination. On the other hand, 1 Cor. 12:7, 11 makes clear that God's Spirit gives his gifts as the Spirit determines, none of which appear to be gender-specific. Galatians 3:28

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clearly declares that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.” At the very least, these texts suggest that men and women, as in creation, are equally valuable in God’s eyes; neither is inherently inferior to the other.

Whether Paul means more than this and is in principle abolishing all role differentiation in the church remains debated. At least in his world, he never takes this step. He commands women to cover their heads as a sign of respect in worship (1 Cor. 11:3–16). He assumes that women may pray and prophesy in church (11:5), but instructs that they should refrain from specific kinds of speech (14:33b–38)—perhaps asking questions during the evaluation of prophecy or expressing views contrary to his own. “Prophecy” in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts could refer to spontaneous utterances of messages believed to be from God (or a god) but also to thoughtfully prepared addresses equally attributed to the divine. Apparently Paul allowed women to do what today would be called preaching.

In the most scrutinized text of all, Paul forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). But the grammatical construction used here, coupled with the observation that teaching and exercising authority are two distinctives of the office of elder/overseer in 1 Timothy (3:2; 5:17), suggest that Paul is merely prohibiting women from the single office of elder or overseer. A discussion of the criteria for overseers and deacons immediately follows, with probable references to women deacons but not to women elders (3:1–13). Nevertheless, the word for having authority in 2:12 is found nowhere else in Scripture and in other Greek literature can mean “to domineer,” so perhaps Paul is prohibiting only an overly harsh use of authority, especially in light of the false teaching with which Timothy’s church in Ephesus was infected.

Debate also continues over Paul’s reasons for his various prohibitions. On the one hand, he regularly refers to the order of creation to buttress gender role distinctions, suggesting that his teaching cannot be dismissed as limited to his time and culture (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 14:34). On the other hand, it is possible that new creation in Christ goes beyond even original creation (Gal. 3:28), so the question of contemporary application is by no means settled.

For Further Reading

Beck, James R., and Craig L. Blomberg, eds. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Belleville, Linda L. *Women Leaders and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

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Piper, John, and Wayne A. Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991.

CRAIG L. BLOMBERG

4:17–5:20 Christian Conduct

Paul disparages the spiritually unenlightened, “impure” behavior of non-Christian Gentiles (4:17–19) and exhorts his audience of believing Gentiles to abandon their own similar, preconversion conduct. The renewal of their minds should issue in actions characterized by Godlike righteousness and holiness. The practical specifics of such living include telling the truth; getting properly angry (at unrighteousness) without letting such anger fester and lead to sin; working hard and sharing with the needy the fruits of one’s labor, instead of stealing; refraining from vulgar talk, and instead uplifting others with one’s speech (4:29; 5:4, 19–20); shedding divisive feelings and conduct toward fellow Christians and instead extending to them Godlike kindness and forgiveness; filling one’s heart with the Holy Spirit rather than overindulging in alcohol (as typical during Hellenistic religious orgies; 5:18)—in short, imitating God as children do their parents. Paul warns against the foolish notion that sinners who persist in their disobedience to God will inherit eternal life anyway. On the contrary, they will incur his wrath—incentive enough to “awake” from spiritual deadness (5:14) and “live as children of light,” not “darkness.” Behaving wisely means translating one’s moral knowledge into action and requires making the most of one’s time to do so (5:15–16).¹⁶

Incommunicable Attributes

- Omnipresent – All Present **Psalm 139:7-16**
- Omnipotent – All Powerful **Revelation 19:6**
- Omniscient - All Knowing **Psalm 33:13-15**
- Immutable – Never Changing **Revelation 1:8**

Ephesians 4:8-10

Luke 11:22 Jesus portrays Himself as someone **stronger** than Satan who overruns Satan’s house and gives the spoils of victory to those who are His (see Eph. 4:8, 9 for a similar concept).¹⁷

EGALITARIANISM A major Christian view on gender roles that holds that women and men properly have equal and interchangeable roles in the home, church, and wider society. This view is opposed to complementarianism, which holds that the proper roles for men and women are distinct and complementary.

Egalitarianism holds that women can hold all the same roles in church leadership as men, and that in a marriage authority is properly shared equally between husband and wife.

¹⁶ Blomberg, C. L. (2011). [Women in the Early Church](#). In G. D. Fee & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (pp. 671–673). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

¹⁷ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). [The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version](#) (Lk 11:22). T. Nelson Publishers.

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Egalitarianism also holds that women and men may properly hold the same positions in society more broadly.

For further information relevant to the debate about egalitarianism versus complementarianism, see these articles: [Complementarianism](#); [Women in Church Leadership](#); [Marriage](#); [Paul the Apostle, Critical Issues](#).¹⁸

COMPLEMENTARIANISM A major Christian view on gender roles that holds that women and men are spiritually equal but have distinct and complementary roles in the home, church, and wider society. This view stands in opposition to egalitarianism, which holds that men and women have equivalent roles.

Complementarian positions usually hold that certain positions in church leadership are reserved for men only, and that in a marriage the husband is properly the head of the family and has some degree of authority over the wife. Some complementarian positions also hold that women and men have different roles outside home and church life in broader society.

For further information relevant to the debate about complementarianism versus egalitarianism, see these articles: [Egalitarianism](#); [Women in Church Leadership](#); [Marriage](#); [Paul the Apostle, Critical Issues](#).¹⁹

WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP Explores the interpretive options for the New Testament texts most relevant to the discussion of the role of women in the New Testament church.

This article focuses on the exegesis and historical background of the New Testament texts related to women in positions of church leadership. The goal is to survey the complexity of the New Testament textual evidence and introduce the main exegetical options that interpreters have offered for dealing with the evidence. It does not address the contemporary debate over applying such passages to the present-day church.

The New Testament Evidence of Women in Church

Two factors contribute to disputes in scholarship regarding whether women held or could have held leadership roles in the New Testament church:

1. Some New Testament passages—such as Acts 18:24–28; Rom 16:1–7; and 1 Cor 11:2–11—appear to present women as occupying leadership roles and carrying out leadership functions in the church.

¹⁸ [Egalitarianism](#). (2016). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

¹⁹ [Complementarianism](#). (2016). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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2. Other New Testament passages appear to prohibit, or at least severely restrict, the participation of women in the church, which would limit or remove their eligibility for serving in leadership roles. The texts commonly appealed to for this perspective are 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:8–15.

Reconciling these two categories of New Testament texts is not always easy, as Susan Mathew notes: “Women in Pauline church leadership have been a focus of much attention due to the incompatible statements Paul makes about the role of women in the church.... There seems to be a question of inconsistency in Pauline views on women” (*Women in the Greetings of Romans 16.1–16*, 10).

The New Testament Examples of Women Serving the Church

As Paul concludes his letter to the church at Rome, he includes a list of noteworthy individuals, many of whom are women. It is significant that so many of these individuals are women. In fact, Massey notes that six of the 27 people mentioned by name are women and that the list also includes two other unnamed women (*Women*, 52). However, it is also important to note that many of the women are commended specifically for their service and contribution to the Christian church. These women, in the estimation of scholars such as Dunn, “evidently assumed roles of some prominence in the Roman churches” (Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 900). To what extent, though, should these women be understood as occupying leadership roles? In this regard, it is necessary to look at how three of these women in particular are described.

Phoebe. In Romans 16:1 Paul writes, “Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a [διάκονον (*diakonon*)] [translated as “servant” in ESV, NASB, NET and as “deacon” in NIV, NRSV] of the church at Cenchreae.” There is ambiguity over the meaning of the term διάκονος (*diakonos*, “deacon, servant”) here. Should this term be understood in an “official sense,” or does it merely refer to “Christian service rendered spontaneously by Phoebe” (Massey, *Women*, 52)? The answer to this question is not immediately obvious. The inclusion of women like Phoebe and Junia in Rom 16 could indicate there were Christian women whose status in the church paralleled the growing status and “new roles for women” in Graeco-Roman society (Winter, *Roman Wives*, 204). Paul’s goal in Rom 16 is to commend these women for their service. He does not spell out the specifics of what that service entails. Nevertheless, despite the ambiguity, some scholars have argued that Phoebe should be understood as a leader. First, the word *diakonos* is used by Paul to refer to himself, Tychicus, Timothy, and Epaphras (Massey, *Women*, 60). In these instances, *diakonos* is often translated “minister.” Massey contends that it is problematic to attribute “less weight” to the term *diakonos* when it is used to describe Phoebe. Second, and also significant, Phoebe is the only one mentioned from the church at Cenchreae (Massey, *Women*, 51). Thus, while it is difficult to comment on the specifics of Phoebe’s office or functions, it is at least clear that “she was an outstanding woman in Paul’s estimation and that she was of great value to the church” (Massey, *Women*, 51).

Junia. In Romans 16:7, Paul greets two people, a man named Andronicus and a woman named Junia, and describes them as ἐπίσημοι (*episēmoi*) [variously translated as “outstanding” (NASB, NIV), “prominent,” (NRSV), or “well-known,” (ESV, NET)] ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (*en tois apostolois*) [usually translated as either “among the apostles” (NASB, NIV, NRSV) or “to the apostles” (ESV,

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NET]). The initial interpretive issue is evident in the way that *episēmoi en tois apostolois* is rendered by the major English translations. Following the translation provided by the ESV and NET, Andronicus and Junia are “well-known to the apostles,” but they are *not* apostles themselves. Alternately, the translation option preferred by the NASB, NIV, and NRSV presents Andronicus and Junia *as* apostles themselves. The NASB, NIV, and NRSV translate both *episēmoi* (“outstanding, prominent”) and *ἐν* (*en*, “among” when it precedes a plural noun) according to their most natural sense. However, there is a second interpretive issue.

The names in Rom 16:7 are both in the Greek accusative case, meaning that the form *Ἰουλίαν* (*Ioulian*) could be understood as the masculine name “Junias,” perhaps a shortened form of the name Junianus (see *BDAG*, s.v. *Ἰουλιᾶς*, *Ioulias*). Perhaps recognizing the difficulty posed by the existence of a female “apostle,” the NASB and the RSV render the Greek name as Junias (the masculine name), rather than as Junia (the feminine name). The ESV, NET, NIV, and NRSV, however, translate the name as Junia, taking the name as referring to a female figure. Reading “Junias” is problematic, however, because the masculine name is “unattested in hellenistic Greek” (Tetlow, *Women and Ministry*, 120). On the other hand, the feminine name “Junia” is “attested as a common name in contemporary hellenistic Greek” (Tetlow, *Women and Ministry*, 120). Moreover, most commentators, including many of the early church fathers, interpreted the Greek name as Junia, the name of a woman, until as late as the 13th century (*Women and Ministry*, 120). Thus it is not unlikely to suppose that a woman named Junia was recognized by Paul as an “apostle,” though it is still unclear what that term might have entailed at the time Romans was written. Dunn contends that Junia (a woman) was “one of the earliest and leading members of the larger group of apostles” (*Romans 9–16*, 900).

Prisca or Priscilla. Paul also mentions a woman named Prisca (or Priscilla) in Rom 16:3. (Priscilla is a diminutive form of the name Prisca.) Paul refers to both her and her husband, Aquila, as *συνεργός* (*synergos*, “coworker, fellow worker”). Prisca, and her work on behalf of the gospel, is mentioned by both Paul (compare 1 Cor 16:19) and by the author of Luke-Acts (compare Acts 18). The story involving Prisca in Acts 18 is particularly interesting. Acts 18:24–28 recounts the story in which Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrives in Corinth and begins preaching in the synagogue. After Apollos addresses the synagogue, Prisca and Aquila approach him and they *both* “explained the way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26 NRSV). The Greek word *ἐκτίθημι* (*ektithēmi*), translated as “explained,” is in its plural form. Thus in Acts 18:24–28, one of Paul’s female “coworkers” is instructing a man (Apollos) in the “way of God.” Moreover, Prisca does not appear to be a complete anomaly. In Philippians 4:2–3, Paul writes that two women, Euodia and Syntyche, “labored side by side with me in the gospel” (RSV). In Romans 16, Paul also names Mary (16:6), Tryphaena, and Persis (16:12), “all of whom he called ‘hard workers’ in the Lord” (Tetlow, *Women and Ministry*, 126).

1 Corinthians 11:2–11. Based on 1 Corinthians 11:2–11, Paul apparently did not explicitly disapprove of women praying and prophesying in public in the context of the church gathering (as long as they wore a head covering; Sampley, *1 Corinthians*, 969). This passage in 1 Corinthians also regulates how women should dress *when* they prophesy in church, but it does not prohibit them from prophesying. Moreover, Massey suggests that we should not distinguish too sharply between prophesying and teaching/preaching. As Massey contends, “Women who

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possessed prophetic gifts played an active role in inspired teaching and preaching, both in assemblies and in public evangelism” (*Women*, 84).

The New Testament Restrictions on Women in Church

The primary New Testament texts that seem to severely restrict the participation of women in public Christian worship or ministry are 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12. Due to the tension between these stark statements and the positive attitude toward women in other passages such as Rom 16, these texts have become a focal point for detailed exegesis. The exegetical issues are evident from an initial, surface-level reading of these two passages:

“As in all the churches of the saints, the women must be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but they must be in submission, just as the law also says. But if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Cor 14:33b–35 LEB).

“A woman must learn in quietness with all submission. But I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (1 Tim 2:11–12 LEB).

A straightforward reading of these passages suggests that women should remain silent in church, that their disposition should be characterized by submission, and that they should not occupy a place of authority over a man.

Summary of Interpretive Difficulties

The New Testament evidence is ambiguous, especially over the question of whether the ministry work of the women mentioned in Rom 16 (and elsewhere) implies they served in any capacity that could be construed as a formal leadership role. Paul does not flesh out exactly what he means by the term *synergos* (“coworker”). Paul may refer to certain women as “hard workers,” but he does not dwell on the specifics of what their “hard work” entailed. There is also ambiguity concerning whether Junia should be viewed as one of the apostles or simply as one who was well-known to the apostles. It is also not entirely clear if words like “deacon” (*diakonos*), “coworker” (*synergos*), or “apostle” (*apostolos*) should even be viewed as technical (or quasi-technical) terms referring to official leadership positions at the time that Romans was written. Nevertheless, the list in Rom 16 has led Dunn to conclude: “So far as this list is concerned, at any rate, Paul attributes leading roles to more women than men in the churches addressed” (Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 900). It is at least reasonable to conclude, with Sampley, that women “were significant workers in the churches and in the gospel” (Sampley, *1 Corinthians*, 969). However, it is harder to determine the extent of their specific roles and the tasks they performed in the early church. At least one example of a woman engaging in evangelism is found in Acts 18:24–28, when Prisca (and her husband Aquila) “explained” to Apollos the ways of God (Massey, *Women*, 50; Tetlow, *Women and Ministry*, 126).

However, the explicit statements restricting the participation of women present a contradiction (or at least a strong tension) between the attitude toward women reflected in Rom 16 and the attitude reflected in 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12. The letter to the Roman church ends commending several women who are apparently serving in some sort of leadership position in the church. This list could be supplemented with texts such as Phil 4:2–3; 1 Cor 11:5; and the examples that Luke-Acts provides of female prophets (Anna at the temple in Luke and the daughters of Philip in Acts). Yet 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy demand

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silence and submission from women in church and restrict them from occupying a place of authority over a man. How do biblical scholars resolve or at least address this tension? What are the interpretative options?

Proposed Solutions for the New Testament Evidence

The main exegetical question concerning the role of women in the churches of the New Testament period is how passages like 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12 should be reconciled with passages such as Acts 18; Rom 16:1–7; Phil 4:2–3; and 1 Cor 11:2–11.

One way to deal with an apparent tension in Scripture is positing that the passage in question that appears to reflect a different teaching may come from a different author. For this reason, some solutions hinge on conclusions about the authorship and date of these particular passages. While the authorship of 1 Corinthians is not disputed, the authorship of 1 Timothy is a matter of intense debate (see Mangum, *1 Timothy*, “Composition”). First Corinthians is recognized as one of the so-called undisputed Pauline letters (along with Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon), but some scholars, such as Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 246), view 1 Cor 14:34–35 (and sometimes v. 36) as a late, non-Pauline interpolation (see Brown, *1 Corinthians*, “Did Paul Write 1 Corinthians 14:34–35?”). Some of the exegetical possibilities discussed below depend on both (1) a late date for and non-Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy and (2) 1 Cor 14:34–35 being a late, non-Pauline interpolation. Others assume or argue in favor of the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy and/or the originality of 1 Cor 14:34–35.

The following four positions reflect the most common conclusions on the New Testament evidence for the role of women in the early church:

1. Women are always and without qualification prohibited from leadership roles.
2. Women were eventually prohibited from leadership roles, but this was a later development.
3. Women were generally prohibited from leadership roles, but there were some notable exceptions.
4. Women were not categorically prohibited from leadership roles, and the prohibitions in the New Testament are directed at specific situations that should not be taken as universal restrictions.

Position 1: The New Testament Reflects an Unqualified Prohibition of Female Leadership

This view claims that the New Testament *always* prohibits women from assuming roles of leadership, or at least roles that involve public speaking and teaching. This position is considered extreme by even many traditional, conservative-leaning biblical scholars. Reading texts such as 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12 as unqualified prohibitions makes it difficult to explain the presence and role of women such as Phoebe, Prisca, Euodia, Junia, and others. How should the terms *synergos* (“coworker”) and *diakonos* (“deacon”) be understood when applied to such women? In explaining what he considers to be two dubious extreme ends of the exegetical spectrum, Towner contends, “These verses [1 Tim 2:11–15] have been overused in the modern church by some who have sought to demonstrate a return by one of Paul’s students to a patriarchal system inimical to the Pauline gospel, and by others to prove the unsuitability of women for the role of teaching in the church” (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 190).

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While Towner may too quickly dismiss the first of these two exegetical options, he rightly notes that texts such as 1 Tim 2:11–12 (and 1 Cor 14:34–35) have been “overused” by people attempting to “prove the unsuitability of women” for holding positions of church leadership. Sensitive readings of 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12 must attend to the literary, historical, and social contexts of these passages.

Position 2: Prohibitions against Female Leadership Are a Later Development

This position argues that the church only began to ban women from leadership at a later point in its history. The earliest church did not prevent women from holding various leadership positions in the congregation. This position, as alluded to in the preceding section, depends on two key factors. First, it is argued that 1 Timothy (as well as 2 Timothy and Titus—the so-called “Pastoral Letters”) are later, non-Pauline texts. First Timothy was written by a disciple of Paul at some point after Paul’s death and reflects a more hierarchical, less egalitarian system of church governance. Second, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is a late, non-Pauline addition to the letter of 1 Corinthians. While Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, a later compiler of his letters added 14:34–35 (and possibly 14:36) to the text.

This position merits consideration for a number of reasons. First, although Loader disagrees with this view, he summarizes one of its main arguments well: “The removal of the passage [in 1 Corinthians], or at least, 14:33b–36, would leave a smooth and coherent flow from 14:33a to 14:37” (Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 383–84). The flow of the passage is not interrupted by the removal of 14:33b–36. This observation is certainly not decisive in and of itself, but, when combined with a number of other factors, it contributes to the overall force of the argument. Second, as Sampley contends, the content of 1 Cor 14:34–35 contradicts statements that Paul makes about women elsewhere, including statements that he makes about women in 1 Corinthians itself (Sampley, *1 Corinthians*, 969). As Bassler asks rhetorically: “How can women like Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2–3), Prisca (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19), Mary (Rom. 16:6), Junia (Rom. 16:7) and Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12) function as co-workers in the churches if they cannot speak in those churches? How can Phoebe fulfill her role of deacon (Rom. 16:1–2) if she cannot speak out in the assembly?” (Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” 327).

In the same regard, it seems problematic that Paul would ban women from speaking publicly after he mentioned (without censure) the public prayer and prophesying of women only a few chapters earlier in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul assumes that it is “quite proper” for women to prophesy as long as it is properly regulated (Sampley, *1 Corinthians*, 969). First Corinthians 14:34–35, however, requires them to remain silent in church.

Finally, some who embrace this perspective note that 1 Cor 14:34–35 is the only passage in Paul’s undisputed letters (i.e., Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon) that “suggests any limitation on the roles or functions of women in the Pauline churches” (Sampley, *1 Corinthians*, 969; emphasis original). If 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 were to be removed from 1 Corinthians, nothing in the undisputed Pauline corpus would suggest that Paul prohibited women from engaging in public ministry and occupying leadership positions. In fact, as Rom 16:1–7 demonstrates, Paul seems to otherwise embrace female leadership in the church.

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Thus, according to this position, women were free to hold leadership positions and speak publicly in the earliest Pauline churches. However, 1 Timothy (and the other “Pastoral Letters”) reflects a very different situation in the late first century when the responsibilities of teaching and preaching were “being absorbed by the office of the presbyter” (Tetlow, *Women*, 127). Women were excluded from the office of the presbyter (as well as the office of bishop) and therefore were also excluded from teaching and preaching in the church (Tetlow, *Women*, 127). According to this view, 1 Cor 14:34–35 was added to the text in order to bring the letter into “conformity” with the perspective espoused in the Pastoral Letters (Sampley, *1 Corinthians*, 969). It is important to note here that this treatment of the issue of female leadership in the New Testament posits a genuine contradiction between the view presented in Rom 16 (and the rest of the undisputed Pauline letters with the exception of 1 Cor 14:34–35) and the view presented in 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12.

Position 3: Female Leadership Was Generally Prohibited, with Some Exceptions

This view holds that, generally speaking, the church’s position was always to ban women from leadership positions, but the church recognized that certain women, specially inspired by the Holy Spirit, were qualified to lead. This position does not require that 1 Cor 14:34–35 be read as a later, non-Pauline interpolation and also allows the conclusion that, as a general rule, Paul (and other early Christians) restricted and even banned women from leadership. This, it is argued, is consistent with the many passages in the New Testament that seem to subordinate women to men. Some of these passages have been quoted above, but additional support for this view is also found in Col 3:18; 1 Cor 11:2–10; and Titus 2:4–9.

According to this position, the New Testament worldview is clear in its hierarchical orientation. As Loader argues, this hierarchical perspective is rooted in the account of creation in Gen 1–3 and is the perspective that Paul (and other early Christians) share in common with the wider Jewish milieu of this period (Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 375, 388). As Loader notes concerning the general disposition of Pauline churches, “As in Jewish communities, normally women would be expected to be silent, so this was to apply in the churches, which, at least in the beginning, understood themselves as Jewish communities anyway” (Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 388). However, Loader acknowledges that there are exceptions to this principle since Paul clearly names women who held leadership positions in the early church. Loader explains, “As in Jewish life there were exceptions where women were inspired to leadership, so in Christian communities there were inspired women exercising ministry, including that of prophecy.... Paul did not conclude that all women were so inspired, but apparently had no difficulties in the fact that some were, provided that they dressed appropriately” (Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 388). Paul conceded that at times the Holy Spirit would transcend this general prohibition. However, even in such cases, Paul maintained the hierarchical order.

Position 4: Prohibitions against Female Leadership Are Contextual

This position asserts that the church never categorically banned women from leadership. The prohibitions against female leadership in the Bible were specific to each church’s situation. This view does not necessitate reading 1 Cor 14:34–35 or 1 Tim 2:11–12 as late and/or non-Pauline. Proponents of this position do not see a genuine contradiction between passages such as Rom

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16:1–7; 1 Cor 11:2–11 and 1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:11–12. While an initial, surface reading of the texts may suggest a contradiction, an analysis of the literary and sociohistorical context of each passage demonstrates that we are dealing with *apparent* contradictions, not genuine contradictions. In order to do justice to this perspective, it is necessary to highlight a few of the exegetical and contextual strategies used to resolve and account for the *apparent* contradictions.

1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Scholars such as Thiselton note that Paul’s letters address particular situations in particular places at a particular historical moment. Modern exegetes, however, only have access to Paul’s words in his letters. Paul uses words and phrases in the context of specific situations. The situation that Paul is addressing (at any given time) was not necessarily elaborated upon or described at length because the original recipients of the letters would not have needed extensive elaboration or description of the situation. Thus, when Paul writes, “[Women] are not allowed to speak [λαλεῖν (*lalein*)]” (1 Cor 14:34), he assumes that his reader understands the point that he is making based on the “*context of the situation*” (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1147; emphasis original). Translation, then, is “immensely difficult” (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1147). What seems like an unqualified prohibition (i.e. “[Women] are not allowed to speak [λαλεῖν, *lalein*]”) is a more complex statement than the mere words suggest. Therefore, the statement (“[Women] are not allowed to speak [λαλεῖν, *lalein*]”) must be considered in light of the situation that Paul is actually addressing, as best as that context can be reconstructed.

When 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is read in light of this larger context, it becomes evident that 1 Cor 11:2–11 addresses an entirely different situation from 1 Cor 14:34–35. Unlike those who see a genuine contradiction between 1 Cor 11:2–11 and 1 Cor 14:34–35, scholars such as Thiselton, Witherington, and Garland understand 1 Cor 11:2–11 and 1 Cor 14:34–35 as fundamentally compatible. However, this compatibility can only be recognized once the context of each passage is illuminated. As Thiselton argues, 1 Cor 11:2–11 deals with the issue of a “woman’s praying (προσευχομένη, *proseuchomenē*) or using prophetic speech (ἡ προφητευσσα, *ē prophēteusasa*)” (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1155). In the context of this specific issue, Paul declares that is “quite permissible” for a woman “to speak” (λαλεῖν, *lalein*), namely, to pray or prophesy in public (so long as her head is covered; *1 Corinthians*, 665). However, when Paul says that it is *not* permissible for a woman “to speak” (λαλεῖν, *lalein*) in 1 Cor 14:34, he has a different type of speech in mind altogether.

When 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is analyzed in light of its surrounding context, it becomes clear that Paul is addressing the issue of “weighing prophecy” (Witherington, *Earliest Churches*, 102). What Witherington means by “weighing prophecy” is “the *activity of sifting or weighing the words of prophets, especially by asking probing questions about the prophet’s theology or even the prophet’s lifestyle in public*” (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1158; emphasis original). In 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, Paul is not banning the public speech of woman as such (the public, prophetic utterances of women); rather, he is dealing with the very specific issue of questioning prophetic utterances. Therefore Paul is not giving an unqualified, general prohibition against the public speech of women (compare 1 Cor 11:5) but is attempting to prevent speech that is potentially disruptive (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1156). Moreover, according to this perspective, Paul is trying to prevent wives from “cross-examining” their husband’s prophetic speech in

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public (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1156). Such cross-examination, if it is to be done, should be done at home (1 Cor 14:35).

1 Timothy 2:11–12. In their discussion of 1 Tim 2:11–12 both Towner and Winter appeal to the historical setting of this document in order to contextually explain the prohibition against female teachers. According to these scholars, 1 Tim 2:11–12 should be read in light of cultural trends concerning women in the Roman world. As Towner observes, “Recent assessments of epigraphic and literary evidence have documented the emergence of a ‘new Roman woman’ ” (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 190). The “new Roman woman” is contrasted with the “traditional Greek woman” (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 190). According to their analysis, the “new Roman woman” enjoys a significant level of freedom and participates in public life far more than the traditional Greek woman (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 190). This new level of freedom and participation in the public sphere for women in the Roman world influenced the role and status of women in the Christian communities as well (Winter, *Roman Wives*, 204). As Winter contends, “Limited though the evidence may be for Christian women, the filtering down of new roles for women enabled Christian women to contribute to a wider sphere of service” (Winter, *Roman Wives*, 204). Thus, as a result of “cultural shifts” in the Roman world in the first century, some wealthy Christian women were able to gain a noticeable amount of influence in the churches (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 191n2). Wealthy Roman (and, according to Towner and Winter, Christian) women were not necessarily relegated to the private sphere and played an increasingly important role in public life (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 191n2; Winter, *Roman Wives*, 204). First Timothy 2:11–12 must be read against the backdrop of these “cultural shifts.”

These scholars argue that, like 1 Cor 14:34–35, 1 Tim 2:11–12 addresses a particular historical situation in the life of a specific church, so the passage should not be understood as an unqualified prohibition against female leadership in general. In order to adequately understand 1 Timothy’s prohibition, then, two issues associated with these “cultural shifts” for women, which were plaguing the church at Ephesus, must be recognized. First, Towner claims that the author of 1 Timothy was concerned with the “outer adornment and apparel and arrogant demeanor” of certain women in the congregation (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 200). The adornment of these women, Towner argues, was associated with the transgression of sexual mores and the rejection of traditional family roles and structures such as childbearing (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 220). Second, Towner posits a situation in which certain wealthy women were embracing and promulgating a “heretical teaching” (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 200). Thus, the prohibition of female teachers, according to Towner, is not a general prohibition, but is rather specific to this historical and social situation. Therefore, 1 Timothy 2:11–12 does not contradict Rom 16:1–7 or Acts 18:24–28 and does not represent a blanket statement made by Paul (Towner argues for Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy) applying to all women, everywhere. Instead, the specific situation, namely certain wealthy women transgressing traditional family roles and espousing false teaching, “led Paul to put a stop to the teaching activities of Christian women” (Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 220). Witherington comes to a similar conclusion regarding the sociohistorical context of 1 Timothy. According to Witherington, 1 Tim 2:11–12 contains no “universal prohibition of women speaking in church” (Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Early Christianity*, 196). Witherington also detects evidence that the author of 1 Timothy was responding to a situation of “women being involved

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in false teaching and being led astray into apostasy” (Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Early Christianity*, 196). Such a view takes seriously the contextual nature of the New Testament letters.

Conclusion

As this article demonstrates, the evidence for (and against) female leadership in the New Testament church is complex and often ambiguous. Coming to a conclusion regarding the scope, specifics, and extent of the roles and functions available to women in the first-century church is extremely difficult and requires the careful exegesis of many complicated texts. Regardless of one’s position, it is important not to read texts such as 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12 in isolation and without careful attention to vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and literary, social, and historical context. The list of women in Roman 16 alone should be enough to caution readers of the New Testament against overly simplistic interpretations of 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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MARRIAGE The Bible often refers to marriage—in stories, in the law of Moses, and in metaphors. The biblical usages reflect the practices of marriage in the ancient Near East and the Graeco-Roman world.

Marriage in the Bible

The Bible begins and ends with marriage (Gen 2:24; Rev 22:20). In between, marriage is a frequent topic.

- There are stories of marriages and married couples (e.g., Gen 3:1–4:2; 12:1–18:15; 21:1–14; 24:1–25:28; 29:1–30:24; Ruth).
- There are rules concerning
 - getting married (Deut 22:13–21; 22:28–29; 25:5–10);
 - being married (Exod 21:10; Deut 21:10–14; Eph 5:21–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Pet 3:1–7);
 - violating marriage (Exod 20:14; Deut 22:1–27; Matt 5:27–28); and
 - ending marriage (Deut 24:1–4; Matt 5:31–32; 19:3–8; 1 Cor 7:12–16).
- There are also passages where marriage is used as a metaphor.
 - Christ is likened to a bridegroom and His followers are the wedding guests (Matt 9:14–15; 22:1–14; 25:1–13).
 - Marriage of a man and a woman is an image of God and His people (Hos 1:2–3:5; Jer 2:1–4:4)
 - or Christ and His church (John 3:28–30; 2 Cor 11:1–3; Rev 19:7–9; 21:2; 22:17–20).

While stories and metaphors that describe the mutual love of a married couple or the children born to them are easily understood, accounts of arranged marriages, endogamy (marrying relatives), or polygamy are not. This is because our social context differs from the social contexts in which the Bible was written. In order to understand marriage in the Bible, therefore, we need to be familiar with marriage in the ancient Near East as well as in the Graeco-Roman world.

Marriage in the Old Testament

Most Old Testament texts about marriage reflect Israelite agrarian society in the early Iron Age. Families lived off the produce of the earth. Men, women, and children worked the land, to process its yield, in order to survive. The family property was owned and managed by the male head of the household, who would pass it down to his sons. Sons would remain in their parents' household, marrying women from outside the immediate family and raising their children on their father's land (Wright, *God's People*, 53–58). Children contributed to the household labor pool, learned how to manage the family farm, and some inherited it upon the death of the

²⁰ Jones, R. (2016). [Women in Church Leadership](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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family patriarch. In order to keep the property intact, the father would leave most of the inheritance to his oldest son (Deut 21:17).

The Bible's first marriage story assumes an agricultural context. Adam is a farmer and Eve is the woman who bears his children (Gen 3:16–19; 4:1–2, 25). They share a life of hard work, and the woman may even be subject to the patriarch's authority. Their marriage is summarized in Gen 2:24: a man seeks a wife from outside his parents' household and the two start a new family unit.

Arranged Marriages

The general Old Testament practice was for parents to arrange marriages for their children. The parents of a son had a significant stake in deciding who would enter their household and mother their grandchildren. Their role in securing wives for their sons can be seen in stories about the marriages of Ishmael (Gen 21:21), Isaac (Gen 24:1–9), and Er (Gen 38:6). When a man chose his own wife—as with Jacob, Shechem, and Samson—his parents still had an interest in his choice (Gen 28:1–5; 34:4; Judg 14:1–3).

Women's family members were equally interested in finding good husbands for them. For example, Abraham's servant deals not only with Isaac's future wife Rebekah but also with her brother Laban and her father Bethuel (Gen 24:15–61). When Jacob falls in love with Rachel, he must arrange the marriage with her father Laban (Gen 29:15–20). It is worth noting that Jacob must compensate Laban before he can marry Rachel (Gen 17; see also Gen 34:12; Exod 22:16–17; Deut 22:29). Laban will lose Rachel's contribution to his household economy, while Jacob will gain her labor and her child-bearing potential. Consequently, Jacob needs to pay his future father-in-law a bride-price (Perdue, "Israelite Family," 184). For her part, Rachel will bring material assets to the marriage, including her maidservant Bilhah (Gen 29:29; see also Gen 24:59–61; Josh 15:18–19). A wife retained control over the property she brought to the marriage. If she lost her husband through death or divorce, it would serve as her economic safety net (Perdue, "Israelite Family," 184).

Endogamy

The marriages of Isaac and Jacob illustrate another feature of ancient Israelite marriage: endogamy. A young man or woman was expected to marry a member of his or her extended family. Rebekah is Isaac's first cousin once removed. Leah and Rachel are Jacob's first cousins on his mother's side and second cousins once removed on his father's side. The advantage for husbands like Isaac and Jacob is that, unlike Esau (Gen 27:46), they are not bringing strange women into their fathers' households. Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel will be used to family customs and relationships, and other adults in the household will be inclined to treat them as family members (Meyers, "Family in Israel," 36).

Endogamy also benefited the fathers of daughters, like Bethuel and Laban. If a man died without sons, his daughters would inherit his property. If those daughters had married strangers, his property would go to the sons of strangers. However, if his daughters had married their cousins, the property would stay in the family (Perdue, "Israelite Family," 183).

In the stories of the patriarchs, the practice of endogamy thus keeps the promised land for the members of Abraham's family. This is why Abraham and Isaac are anxious to find wives for

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their sons among the descendants of Abraham's father Terah (Gen 24:1–9; 28:1–5). Indeed, Abraham's own wife Sarah is his half-sister, a daughter of Terah (Gen 20:12).

Not only is it important for the promised land to belong to Israel, it is also necessary for the portion allotted to a particular tribe to remain within that tribe. In Numbers 27:1–12, for example, the five daughters of Zelophehad inherit his property. In Num 36:1–13 Moses commands them to make endogamous marriages so that Zelophehad's property stays within the tribe of his clan.

The concern for endogamous marriage reached a peak after the Babylonian Exile (Neh 10:30; 13:3, 23–30; Ezra 9:1–10:44), when the Judaeans who resettled Jerusalem made it a priority to maintain their ethnic identity and religious practices. Priests were especially required not to "marry out," so that they and their sons would not introduce foreign innovations into temple worship (Ezra 10:18–44).

Marriage and Extramarital Sex

Marriage gave a man exclusive reproductive rights with his wife. If these rights were honored, then his property would pass to his biological children. It was important, therefore, for a man to marry a virgin so that the paternity of his first child would be certain. This made it necessary for a father to guard the virginity of his daughters so that he could see them safely married. A family's honor thus depended on the patriarch's ability to control the sexual activity of his female dependents, including wives, daughters, and unmarried sisters (Yee, "Hosea," 301–02).

Old Testament law reflects the significance of male reproductive rights and family honor. For example, Deuteronomy 22:13–21 imposed a severe penalty on a bride whose husband discovered that she was not a virgin. She was stoned to death because she had besmirched her father's honor and violated the reproductive rights of her future husband. The adultery prohibition also functioned to guard a husband's reproductive rights and family honor. If a woman who was either married or betrothed to a husband were to have sex with any other man, both she and the man were put to death (Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; 20:10; Deut 22:22–24). The story of David and Bathsheba demonstrates the importance of a husband's reproductive rights (2 Sam 11:1–27). After David has sex with Bathsheba, her pregnancy threatens to expose him to Bathsheba's husband Uriah, the man whose rights he has violated. He therefore tries to deceive Uriah, and finally has him killed.

The law also addresses rape. If the woman was married, the rapist had violated the rights of her husband. The law pronounced her innocent and the rapist was executed (Deut 22:25–27). If she was a virgin, the rapist had violated the rights of her father, ruining his chances of arranging a suitable marriage for her (Deut 22:28–29). Therefore, the rapist was required to pay the father an extravagant bride-price and marry the woman (Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity," 92). When Shechem rapes Dinah, he acts responsibly by offering her father, Jacob, a bride-price so that he can marry her (Gen 34:1–12). Amnon, however, by refusing to marry his half-sister Tamar, has made her ineligible for marriage to any other man in her social class. Her brother Absalom becomes responsible for her and for the defense of the family's honor (2 Sam 13:1–20).

Polygamy

Once married, couples were expected to produce children. This was especially important for men with property, who needed adult sons to inherit their land and goods. Due to the high

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mortality rate for infants as well as for women in childbirth, the birth of a son and his survival into adulthood was by no means guaranteed. Some men therefore practiced polygamy in order to ensure at least one male heir. Some Old Testament polygamists include Esau (Gen 26:34; 36:1–5), Jacob (Gen 29:21–30), Gideon (Judg 8:30–31), and Elkanah (1 Sam 1:1–2).

The Bible indicates that favoritism was a common problem in polygamous marriages. Jacob, for example, clearly favored Rachel (Gen 29:30), and Elkanah gave special attention to Hannah (1 Sam 1:4–8). A polygamist who was partial to one wife tended to disregard the rights of his other wives and their children. Therefore, the law included two statutes that restricted the consequences of favoritism.

- A firstborn son had rights of inheritance even if his father disliked his mother (Deut 21:15–17).
- A man could not favor a second, beloved wife at the expense of a first wife (Exod 21:10). A man who took a second wife had to contribute equally to the support of both wives. This included giving them both the opportunity to conceive children. Presumably, then, only very wealthy men could afford to support more than one wife and her children.

Royal Marriage

Wealthy and influential families often used marriages to form alliances with other prominent families. This was especially true of royal families. For example, David's marriages to Saul's daughter Michal and to Abigail, the widow of a wealthy Judahite landowner, seem like clear bids for influence and property (1 Sam 18:17–29; 25:2–42; Levenson and Halpern, "David's Marriages," 507–511).

Later royal marriages are intended to cement political ties between nations:

- David to Maacah of Geshur (2 Sam 3:3)
- Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kgs 9:16)
- Ahab to Jezebel of Phoenicia (1 Kgs 16:31)
- Jehoram of Judah to Athaliah of Israel (2 Kgs 8:26)

Psalms 45 was probably commissioned for such a royal wedding. It describes a handsome king, his bride who must forget her people, and their expected offspring. Kings in particular had the political incentive and necessary resources to marry several wives. The wealthy king Solomon is said to have had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3).

Death and Divorce

A man's reproductive rights with his wife were terminated either by his death or by his choosing to end the marriage in divorce. In either case, the woman was free to marry another man. An exception, however, applied to childless widows. If a married man died before producing an heir, he left the succession in limbo. It is here that the practice of levirate marriage came into play.

Levirate Marriage. It was the duty of the nearest male relative of a deceased man to marry the childless widow and to father her children. Her firstborn son would then be acknowledged as the son of her deceased husband and would inherit his property. This practice is known as

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levirate marriage (from “levir,” Latin for “husband’s brother”). It is codified in Deut 25:5–10 and enforced with strong sanctions. Boaz enters into a levirate marriage with his kinsman’s widow, Ruth. Their son Obed then stands to inherit the property of Ruth’s deceased father-in-law Elimelech (Ruth 4:10). Judah’s son Onan similarly enters into a levirate marriage with his brother Er’s widow Tamar (Gen 38:8–10). Onan’s duty to father his brother’s children is so important that God punishes his negligence with death.

Divorce. If a man was not pleased with his wife, the law allowed him to divorce her. In the certificate of divorce, he publicly relinquished his reproductive rights, thus enabling her to remarry (Deut 24:1–2). A divorced wife retained her pre-marital property in addition to any divorce settlement as agreed between her husband and her father. If a divorced woman remarried and her second husband also divorced her, the first husband was not permitted to remarry her (Deut 24:3–4). Since he had already renounced his rights, he could not reclaim them and so profit from any divorce settlement from her second marriage (Frymer-Kensky, “Deuteronomy,” 65).

Divorce was always the prerogative of the husband, never of the wife. A husband had little incentive to divorce his wife indiscriminately, however, since he stood to lose the value of his wife’s labor and reproductive capacity along with the resources she had brought into the marriage—not to mention the bride-price he had given to her father.

There were only two cases in which a man was forbidden to divorce his wife: if upon their marriage he had falsely accused her of not being a virgin (Deut 22:19) and if he had raped her before their marriage (Deut 22:29). These laws protected the interests of the woman’s father (and, incidentally, those of the woman as well).

The Song of Songs

Although the Bible sometimes refers to love between husbands and wives (e.g., Gen 24:67; 29:18–20; 1 Sam 18:28), it does not give details of their sexual relationships. Husbands “know” (Gen 4:1 NRSV) or “go in to” (Gen 29:23, 30 NRSV) their wives, thereby producing children. The one exception is the Song of Songs (also known as the Song of Solomon), a lengthy erotic dialogue between young lovers. The Song is interpreted in different ways. Since the publication of Budde’s article “Das Hohelied” in 1898, many Christians have regarded the Song as a wedding song. More recently, however, it has been argued that it resembles Egyptian love songs composed for entertainment on festive occasions (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 247–9). Although the Song refers to marriage (e.g., Song 3:6–11; 4:8–12), its subject is not marriage per se (Fox, *Song of Songs*, 232, 314). It emphasizes the lovers’ delight in each other’s bodies (4:1–7; 5:10–16; 6:4–10; 7:1–9) and their idyllic trysts (1:16–17; 2:8–17; 6:11–12; 7:10–8:5).

Marriage as a Metaphor

Israel’s prophets used marriage between man and woman as a metaphor for the relationship between God and His people. This was especially true of Hosea and Jeremiah, who prophesied against Israel’s idolatry. Both prophets compared the love of a husband for his wife with the love of God for His people. They also likened a wife’s adulterous relationship with another man to Israel’s idolatrous worship of other gods (Hos 1:2–2:23; Jer 2:1–4:4). Hosea not only made the comparisons but also lived them out by marrying a “wife of whoredom” (Hos 1:2–3 NRSV).

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He was optimistic that God, like a loving husband, would restore His relationship with His unfaithful people (Hos 2:14–23). Jeremiah, on the other hand, remarked that God would be within His rights to “divorce” them (Jer 3:1).

Hosea 3:1–5 introduces another comparison: the royal and religious institutions that mediate between Israel and God are like the intercourse between a husband and wife. Israel will temporarily live without these mediators, just as the prophet’s adulterous wife must learn to live exclusively with her husband.

Marriage in the New Testament

Marriage in the Graeco-Roman world was not much different from marriage in the ancient Near East. It still served the social function of maintaining family property and passing it down from father to son. Men held authority over their families, including wives, children, and slaves (Verner, *Household*, 30). Roman law, however, allowed both for a husband to divorce his wife and a wife to divorce her husband. Jewish law upheld only the husband’s right to divorce his wife (Deut 24:1–2). Levirate marriage and polygamy, while still legal among Jews, were not commonly practiced (Verner, *Household*, 46).

Jesus and Marriage

Jesus is reported to have reinterpreted three Old Testament teachings concerning marriage.

Adultery. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the law forbidding adultery (Exod 20:14 in Matt 5:27–30). Jesus extends the principle of the law so that a man who simply desires another man’s wife has already committed adultery with her.

Divorce. Jesus also reinterprets the law allowing divorce (Deut 24:1–2). Paul is the earliest New Testament writer to record this teaching (1 Cor 7:11): “the husband should not divorce his wife” (NRSV). According to Mark 10:2–9 and Matt 19:3–8, Jesus issued this ruling in a legal dispute with some Pharisees, who themselves disagreed over the interpretation of Deut 24:1–2. For Jesus, however, the precedent is not Deut 24:1–2 but God’s earlier pronouncement in Gen 2:24: “they become one flesh” (NRSV). Divorce and remarriage, therefore, lead to adultery (Mark 10:11; Matt 5:31–32; 19:9; Luke 16:18).

Paul and Mark’s Gospel extend the prohibition of divorce to wives (1 Cor 7:10; Mark 10:12). In addition, Paul gave his opinion that a believer should not initiate divorce proceedings against an unbelieving spouse. In Paul’s view, such a marriage should end only at the initiative of the unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12–16). Paul does not articulate an explicit rule for remarriage in this case.

Although Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include Jesus’ teachings on divorce, each Gospel offers a slightly different account. In Mark’s version, Jesus’ dispute with the Pharisees ends with the conclusion that people should not separate what God has joined (Mark 10:2–9). Jesus then teaches his disciples that divorce and remarriage lead to adultery (Mark 10:10–12). The fact that Mark’s account applies this rule to both men and women is significant. It not only accounts for a woman’s ability to divorce her husband, it also reinterprets the Old Testament definition of adultery. The laws in Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; 20:10; and Deut 22:22–24 regard adultery as an offense by the adulterous couple against the woman’s husband. Mark 10:11–12, however, makes it equally possible for a husband to commit adultery against his wife.

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Luke does not report Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees. He does, however, include a version of the teaching about remarriage and adultery. In this teaching—also directed at the Pharisees—a man commits adultery either if he divorces his wife and marries another woman or if he marries a divorced woman (Luke 16:18).

Matthew's Gospel includes two teachings on divorce. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:31–32). Jesus delivers the teaching that also appears in Luke 16:18. Later, Matthew includes the dispute with the Pharisees found in Mark (Matt 19:3–9). The ruling that a man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, given to the disciples in Mark 10:11–12, is announced to the Pharisees in Matt 19:9. Unlike Mark, Matthew does not specify that the man commits adultery against his wife, nor does he extend the rule to women who divorce their husbands. Furthermore, Matthew adds an interesting exception to Jesus' rule: remarriage leads to adultery unless the woman was divorced because of "unchastity (*πορνεία, porneia*)" (Matt 5:32; 19:9 NRSV). The interpretation hangs on the meaning of *porneia*, a noun that can describe various kinds of sexual deviance. If it refers to adultery, then the saying seems to allow men to divorce unfaithful wives, an exception with which one school of Pharisees would have agreed (Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 175). On the other hand, *porneia* might refer to a marriage that violates one of the laws against incest (Lev 18:1–18). Such marriages were not uncommon in the Graeco-Roman world. In that case, the teaching in Matthew permits divorce only for persons married to their close relations. Matthew's logic can also lead to the conclusion that the husband who divorces an adulterous wife is not responsible for her adultery, because she already committed adultery before he divorced her.

Levirate Marriage. Jesus makes one brief comment on the law concerning levirate marriage (Deut 25:5–10). It does not pertain to the dead after their resurrection, he says. There is no marriage in the afterlife (Mark 12:18–25; Matt 22:23–30; Luke 20:27–35). Jesus apparently never married. In Matthew 19:10–12, He seems to advocate the single life for any of His followers who are able to remain celibate.

Paul and Marriage

Paul seems not to have married, either. Like Jesus, he advocated celibacy (1 Cor 7:8). He reasoned that if Jesus is coming again soon, believers who are able may choose not to marry and thus devote themselves fully to ministry. Their first priority is to please God (1 Cor 7:25–35). However, Paul conceded that it is not wrong to marry. In fact, those who cannot control their sexual desires should go ahead and get married (1 Cor 7:6–9, 36–38). Once they are married, a couple should have sex. They are not so spiritual that they do not need to satisfy their physical needs (1 Cor 7:1–5).

Household Codes

Codes of behavior for husbands, wives, children, and slaves are articulated in Eph 5:21–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; and 1 Pet 2:18–3:7. These codes reflect contemporary practice in Graeco-Roman society, in which all family members were subordinate to the male head of the household. In order for Christian households to conform to the social standard, a wife is told in these codes to be subject to her husband's authority (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1). Husbands, however, are warned not to abuse this authority (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7). They are to treat their wives

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with love, consideration, and respect. The code in Ephesians underscores these injunctions with an illustration: Christ loves and cares for the church (Eph 5:25–27, 29). He is the head of the church, and the church submits to his authority (Eph 5:23–24).

Marriage as a Metaphor

The New Testament compares the arrival of the prophesied Messiah to a wedding. Each event ends a long period of waiting. Jesus compared Himself to the bridegroom and His followers to the wedding guests in different ways:

- Jesus explains why His disciples do not fast by saying that wedding guests celebrate by feasting (Mark 2:18–20; Matt 9:14–15; and Luke 5:33–35).
- The parable of the Wedding Feast addresses both those who refuse God’s invitation and those who accept it but do not adhere to His standards (Matt 22:1–14).
- The parable of the Ten Virgins suggests that Jesus’ second coming might be delayed. Therefore, His followers should be prepared (Matt 25:1–13).

John’s gospel also uses a marriage metaphor (John 3:28–30). John the Baptist likens Jesus to a bridegroom and himself to the bridegroom’s friend—Jesus is the Messiah, John is the forerunner who rejoices in the Messiah’s presence. John’s following will decrease, but Jesus will gain followers, just as a bridegroom gains children.

The analogy seems to be continued in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42). The story reminds us of Old Testament scenes in which the meeting of a man and a woman at a well leads to a marriage (Gen 24:1–67; 29:1–20; Exod 2:15–22). Jesus and the woman do not get married, of course, but the Samaritans who now believe in Jesus increase His following, as in the Baptist’s saying (John 4:39–41; 3:30).

Paul uses a marriage metaphor in 2 Cor 11:1–3. He too portrays the Messiah (Christ) as a bridegroom and His followers (Paul’s Corinthian converts) as a bride. But Paul’s converts have been persuaded by teachings that contradict his own (2 Cor 11:4). He illustrates his anxiety by comparing the wait for Christ’s coming to a period of betrothal. Just as a father desires to keep his daughter a virgin until she is married to her husband, so Paul desires to keep his converts faithful. Their following “another Jesus” is like a betrothed daughter accepting the advances of another man.

In the visions of Revelation, the relationship between Christ and His followers is finally consummated with a wedding. The bride is clothed in fine linen, the invited guests have assembled, the bride is joined to her husband, and the marriage feast begins (Rev 19:7–9; 21:2). The community of righteous believers will finally, joyfully unite with Christ. In the meantime, the bride—the church—joins the Spirit, the author, and the audience of Revelation in saying, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:17–20 NRSV).

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Paul's Views Regarding Women

An ongoing debate within the study of Paul's letters involves his statements about women, which have been a target of feminist and deconstructionist interpreters (Fiorenza, *In Memory*).

²¹ McWhirter, J. (2016). [Marriage](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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Particular texts that draw scrutiny include Rom 16:1–15; Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:34–36; Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18; and 1 Tim 2:8–15.

Submission of Wives to Husbands

In passages such as Eph 5:22–33 and Col 3:18, Paul calls for wives to submit to their husbands within the family structure. Among interpreters, a key point of discussion is whether “headship” (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) refers to authority, source, or preeminence (Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 812–22). Depending on the understanding of this term, scholars see Paul as either egalitarian or complementarian with regard to marriage (Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*; Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not*).

Women in the Church

Paul’s views concerning women in ministry have generated significant debate. Paul appears to impose clear limitations on women with passages like 1 Cor 14:35–36: “If they [women] want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” Fee suggests this remark was a later addition (Fee, *Corinthians*, 699–705), while Keener suggests that Paul likely was encouraging uneducated women to refrain from interrupting the teaching (Keener, *Paul*, 80–85). While some of Paul’s statements appear to restrict women’s roles within the Church, others appear to encourage women to practice some form of public speaking in the church. First Corinthians 11:5, which refers to women praying and prophesying, suggests that Paul did not expect complete silence from women.

An especially controversial passage is 1 Tim 2:8–15, which commands women to learn quietly with a submissive spirit. As 1 Timothy 2:12 states, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Paul bases this teaching on the creation account, noting that Adam was made before Eve. Interpreters have proposed various ways to read 1 Tim 2:12:

- Piper, Grudem, Köstenberger, and Schreiner argue that the verse provides conclusive evidence that men alone should teach and exercise authority in the Church (Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*; Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women*).
- Keener suggests that this injunction was a result of the social situation in Ephesus: Since the women there were not trained, they should not have been teaching. Keener further argues that the women at Ephesus may have been susceptible to error due to their lack of training and that some women may have inappropriately tried to seize authority, leading to Paul’s response (Keener, *Paul*).
- Kroeger and Kroeger suggest that Paul is refuting a pre-gnostic idea that was being expressed by women at Ephesus. In this view, Paul is insisting that these women should be silent rather than pass along this errant teaching (Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not*).

The personal greetings in Rom 16:1–15 imply that women held leadership roles in the Roman churches, and Paul names as many women as men. Furthermore, Keener notes that Paul specifically commends twice as many women as men (Keener, *Paul*). Women mentioned in Rom 16 include:

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- Phoebe, who was a patron of the church in Cenchreae and a deacon (Rom 16:1). Paul recommends her to the church in Rome.
- Prisca, who is listed as a fellow worker with Paul along with her husband, Aquila (Rom 16:3). Prisca is named before Aquila, possibly indicating that she had a higher social status.
- Junia, Paul's fellow prisoner, who was "well known to the apostles" (Rom 16:7).
- Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, who are described as workers in the Lord (Rom 16:12).

Additionally, in Philippians 4:2–3, Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Since these women labored alongside Paul and are considered "fellow coworkers" along with Clement, Paul thinks it is important that they agree.

The Teachings of Paul and Jesus

The relationship between Paul's teaching and Jesus' teaching bears significant ramifications for reading the New Testament. Scholars have examined differences and similarities in the theological perspectives of Paul and the Gospel writers.

Differences

Some scholars criticize Paul for emphasizing teachings different from those of Jesus. For example, beginning in the 19th century, von Harnack, among others, argued that Jesus taught simple truths such as the kingdom of God, the brotherhood of man, and the value of the human soul, but Paul changed those basic ideas into complex doctrines (von Harnack, *Wesens*).

Vermes further develops this point, arguing that the historical Jesus is different from the Christ presented by Paul and the Church (Vermès, *Jesus*). Schoeps claims that Paul was influenced by a misleading perspective of the law that emerged from Hellenistic Judaism. He argues that this led Paul to present a different gospel perspective from that of Jesus (Schoeps, *Paul*). More recently, Maccoby argues that Paul invented the myth that Jesus was divine and identifies Paul—not Jesus—as the founder of Christianity (Maccoby, *Mythmaker*).

The group of scholars known as the Jesus Seminar also separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of Paul. These scholars reexamine data about Jesus apart from claims of theological suppositions. Arguing that culture, politics, and a quest for empire influenced Paul more than theology, Crossan continues to promote differences between the teachings of Jesus and those of Paul (Crossan, *Paul*).

Similarities

Scholarship also recognizes points of overlap in the teachings of Paul and Jesus. Wenham identifies the following similarities (see Wenham, *Paul*):

- The transforming grace promoted in Rom 1–8 reflects the grace displayed in Jesus' parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son in Luke 15.
- Jesus' commandment to love God and neighbor in Matt 22:36–40 is similar to that found in Rom 13:8–10.
- The respect that Jesus gives to women is reflected in Paul's greetings in Rom 16.
- The Lord's Supper tradition of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20) is reflected in 1 Cor 11:23–26.

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Still points out additional similarities between the teachings of Paul and Jesus (Still, *Jesus and Paul*):

- Both Jesus and Paul portrayed a God of kindness and severity, whose mercy is offensive and uncanny.
- Both Jesus and Paul spoke about the demands of the law and about grace.
- Both Jesus and Paul cared for the socially poor and destitute.

Cultural Influences in Paul's Letters

Paul's letters demonstrate Jewish, Greek, and Roman influences. Identifying the sources that inform Paul's writing and their interplay is particularly important for interpreting the controversial sections of his writing. In Hafemann's view, determining the main context of Paul's thought is a significant yet unresolved issue in Pauline studies (Hafemann, "Paul and His Interpreters"). Wright describes the various cultural influences as "multiple, overlapping and sometimes competing narratives" (Wright, *Paul*, 6). Witherington notes the importance of Paul's Jewish, Roman, and Christian backgrounds and describes them as "The Trinity of Paul's Identity" (Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, 52).

Jewish Influence

Paul describes his Jewish pedigree in Phil 3: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3:5–6 ESV). Luke records Paul providing a similar biography in Acts 22: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day" (Acts 22:3 ESV).

Although Paul was Jewish and identified with the people of Israel (Rom 9:1–5; 11:1–3; Phil 3:5–9), scholars debate the extent of Jewish influence on Paul's thought. Particular attention is paid to Old Testament citations, often introduced in Paul's letters with phrases like "for it has been written" or "just as it has been written." Some scholars question why Paul adjusts the wording of various scriptural texts (Stanley, *Paul and the Language*) and whether Paul uses the Old Testament in relation to its context. Longenecker and Hanson claim that Paul takes texts out of context and applies them in their contemporary situation regarding Christ (Longenecker, *Exegesis*, 206; Hanson, *Studies*, 157). Beale and Dodd contend that Paul uses Old Testament Scriptures as signposts pointing back to the Old Testament context (Beale, *Right Doctrine*, 167–216; Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 126–27). Rosner and Williams draw attention to Paul's use of Scripture in relation to early Jewish literature (Rosner, *Paul*; Watson, *Paul*; Williams, *Wisdom*). Recent studies also focus on less explicitly Jewish references, such as allusions (implied references to the Old Testament Scriptures) and echoes (conscious or unconscious uses of specific Scriptures; see Hays, *Echoes*; Wagner, *Heralds*; Rosner, *Paul*).

Graeco-Roman Influence

Paul's thought and theology also were influenced by Graeco-Roman culture, language, and customs. In particular, the form of Paul's letters and his awareness of Graeco-Roman thought and philosophy play significant roles in the interpretation of his writings.

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Literary and Rhetorical Conventions. Scholars debate whether Paul used standard types of rhetoric in his letters. In the 1970s, Funk and Betz revived the study of epistolography—the principles and practices of letter-writing (Funk, *Language*; Betz, *Galatians*). They reconsidered New Testament letters in relation to other ancient letters by examining the various components, such as a thanksgiving or a body section.

Some scholars have claimed that Paul’s letters reflect particular Graeco-Roman literary and rhetorical conventions. For example, Mitchell argues that deliberative rhetoric influenced 1 Corinthians (Mitchell, *Rhetoric*), and Betz identifies Galatians as an apologetic letter (Betz, *Galatians*). Others see little direct reliance on Graeco-Roman forms, but nevertheless recognize characteristics that resemble ancient Graeco-Roman letters.

Scholars generally recognize that Paul’s letters have three to five sections (see the articles in Porter and Adams, *Paul and the Ancient Letter*), including:

1. opening;
2. thanksgiving;
3. body;
4. parenesis; and
5. closing.

Terms and Concepts. Paul’s letters reflect the influence of various terms and concepts from Graeco-Roman culture. Some of these parallels involve geographical or scientific matters, while others are literary. Examples include:

- “guardian” (παιδαγωγός, *paidagōgos*; Gal 3:24–25)
- “judgment seat” (βῆμα, *bēma*; 2 Cor 5:10)
- legal language (e.g., Christ has canceled the bond that stood against us; Col 2:14)
- athletic imagery (e.g., 1 Cor 9:24–27; Evans, “Paul”)
- slogans like “all things are permitted for me” (1 Cor 6:12), which reflect the Graeco-Roman idea of imitation (Garland, *1 Corinthians*; Betz, *Nachfolge*; Smit, *Paradigms*)
- adoption terminology, which may stem from the Roman idea of sonship (Burke, “Adopted”)
- references to boasting (Winter, *Philo*)
- criticism of the Graeco-Roman concept of patronage (Clarke, *Secular*; Chow, *Patronage*)
- statements that challenge or modify Graeco-Roman views on leadership (Barentsen, *Emerging*)

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9:19–26 God is not required to answer to mankind. Just as the clay lacks power and authority to question the work of the potter, so no one has authority to question the ways of God. In all things, God, as the potter, prepared vessels both for destruction in order to reveal His wrath and power and for mercy to reveal His glory and love. God acts consistently with His character as He has revealed Himself in Christ. Gentiles as well as Jews were included in God's redemptive plan (vv. 25, 26; see Hos. 1:10; 2:23). "My people" is covenant language indicating

²² Williams, D. (2016). [Paul the Apostle, Critical Issues](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

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the restoration of the covenant relationship (Rom. 9:25, 26; see Jer. 32:38). The designation “vessels of wrath” refers to the unbelieving to whom God has unceasingly extended pleading hands (Rom. 9:22; see 10:21).

EGALITARIANISM: *No Distinction in Roles*

The dictionary defines an egalitarian as one who believes in the equality of all people. However, in contemporary society many insist that “equality” means that no distinction in roles can exist. The Bible presents equality and role distinction as different but compatible aspects of human existence. There is a difference in who a person is and what a person does. What a woman does, however menial the task, does not lessen her worth as a person.

Each individual stands before God created in His image, yet, at the same time, a sinner in need of salvation (Gen. 1:27; Rom. 3:23). Therefore, each person has at the same time both an infinite equality of worth before God and in the midst of others and a total equality of need for Jesus Christ as Savior. Yet out of this same “lump of clay” called humanity, the Creator has chosen to make vessels of various kinds and for various purposes according to His will (Is. 29:16). Therefore, in contrast to the world’s view, biblical egalitarians should not only recognize the equality of all people but also recognize God’s right to assign to those people different functions and roles (Ezek. 33:17).

See also Gen. 1:26–29; Is. 3:12; 4:1; Ezek. 16:17, 45; Gal. 3:28; notes on Complementarity (Eph. 5); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Submission (1 Pet. 3)²³

²³ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [The Woman’s Study Bible](#) (Ro 9:19). Thomas Nelson.