



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

- April 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

Week 15: Family Dynamics Part III

Week 16:

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.

Recap:

14 = Imitate Christ (Shadow)

15 = Household Codes for a New Family

HOUSEHOLD CODES A type of text found in ancient Greek literature including the New Testament that described the relationships between different members of the household in the domestic and public life. The category is sometimes referred to by its German name *Haustafeln*, usually translated “household codes.”

Biblical Relevance

Examples of household codes in the New Testament include:

- Ephesians 5:21–6:9;
- Colossians 3:18–4:1;
- First Peter 2:18–3:7;
- First Timothy 2:8–15;
- First Timothy 6:1–2;
- Titus 2:1–3:8.

It is my relationship with Jesus Christ that defines me.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Galatians 3:26-28

²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There 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.

Ephesians 5:15-17 – Walk wise in the evil days

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

WE ARE GOING TO NEED BOTH OF THESE AGAIN:

Vs 18 – Be being filled with the Spirit **Vs 21** – Be subordinate to one another

Ephesians 6:10-24

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Final Greetings

*²¹So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. ²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ **with love incorruptible.***

Peroration [perə' rāSHən]:

The author or speaker reiterates/summarizes the main themes of the letter or speech **to motivate the audience to action.**



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Paul reminds us of:

- The 'putting on' of God's own armor is another facet of imitating Him.
- Paul is referencing **Isaiah 59:14-21** Judgment and Redemption

¹⁴ Justice is turned back,

and righteousness stands far away;

for truth has stumbled in the public squares,

and uprightness cannot enter.

¹⁵ Truth is lacking,

and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him

that there was no justice.

¹⁶ He saw that there was no man,

and wondered that there was no one to intercede;

then his own arm brought him salvation,

and his righteousness upheld him.

¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate,

and a helmet of salvation on his head;

he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,

and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

¹⁸ According to their deeds, so will he repay,

wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies;

to the coastlands he will render repayment.

¹⁹ So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west,

and his glory from the rising of the sun;

for he will come like a rushing stream,

which the wind of the Lord drives.

²⁰ "And a Redeemer will come to Zion,

to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the Lord.

²¹ "And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the Lord, "from this time forth and forevermore."

Paul Reminds Us:

- We are not individuals wearing God's Armor...standing alone.
We are interwoven in His shadow **standing together**.

[RED ROVER GAME]

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).

Neufeld, T.R.Y. (2001). Ephesians (pp.269-321). Herald Press.

- It is God's battle we are waging, interwoven, wearing(putting on) His armor.
- NOT defensive war.
- NOT a victory dance.
- The Enemy has been ultimately defeated and he wants to take others into his defeat with him.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

- It is a battle cry reminiscent of the O.T.

Ex. 15:3 The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name.

Num. 10:35

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you."

Ps. 35:1-3, 22-28

Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!

²Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help!

³Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers!

Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"

Ps. 35:22-28

You have seen, O Lord; be not silent! O Lord, be not far from me!

²³Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, my God and my Lord!

²⁴Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness, and let them not rejoice over me!

²⁵Let them not say in their hearts, "Aha, our heart's desire!" Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up."

²⁶Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether who rejoice at my calamity! Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves against me!

²⁷Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore,

"Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant!"

²⁸Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.

Is. 42:13

The Lord goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his zeal; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes.

Jdg 5:12.

"Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break out in a song!

Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

Isaiah 40:18-31 [READ]

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?

¹⁹*An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains.*

²⁰*He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.*

²¹*Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?* ²²*It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;*

²³*who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.*

²⁴*Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.*

²⁵*To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*

²⁶*Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?*

He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name;

by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

²⁷*Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,*

"My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"?

²⁸*Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹*He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.*

³⁰*Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;*

³¹*but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Paul Reminds Us:

- War is happening in the heavenlies/supernatural.
- Standing: Main focus of God’s strategy.
Stand dressed in God’s armor.
Defeat dressed in God’s armor.
Destroy dressed in God’s armor.
“And having conquered completely, to be standing.”

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).

Neufeld, T.R.Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp.269-321). Herald Press.

Let’s get dressed...while standing in Red Rover Formation:

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord

[Ephesians 3:16 ESV](#)

that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through

and in the strength of His might.

[Ephesians 1:19 ESV](#)

and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the...

10. **Finally** (τὸ λοιπόν). See on 2 Cor. 13:11. Omit *my brethren*.

Be strong (ἐνδυναμοῦσθε). Lit., *be strengthened*.

Rom. 4:20 No unbelief made him (Abraham) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

Philip. 4:13. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Power of His might. See on ch. 1:19.¹

“For the rest, brothers of me, be empowered in (the) Lord, and in the might o the strength of Him.

“SEIZE POWER! FILL YOURSELF WITH GOD’S POWER!”

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

¹ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, p. 405). Charles Scribner’s Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

11 Put on 2476

Eph 4:17-5:3

2476 ἵστημι [*histemi* /his·tay·mee/] v. A prolonged form of a primary *stao* (**stah**-o, of the same meaning, and used for it in certain tenses); TDNT 7:638; TDNTA 1082; GK 2705; 158 occurrences; AV translates as “stand” 116 times, “set” 11 times, “establish” five times, “stand still” four times, “stand by” three times, translated miscellaneous 17 times, and “vr stand” twice. **1** to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set. **1A to bid to stand by, [set up]. 1A1 in the presence of others**, in the midst, before judges, before members of the Sanhedrin;. **1A2** to place. **1B** to make firm, fix establish. **1B1** to cause a person or a thing to keep his or its place. **1B2** to stand, be kept intact (of family, a kingdom), to escape in safety. **1B3** to establish a thing, cause it to stand. **1B31 to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything.** **1C** to set or place in a balance. **1C1** to weigh: money to one (because in very early times before the introduction of coinage, the metals used to be weighed). **2** to stand. **2A** to stand by or near. **2A1** to stop, stand still, **to stand immovable**, stand firm. **2A1A** of the foundation of a building. **2B** to stand. **2B1** continue safe and sound, stand unharmed, to stand ready or prepared. **2B2** to be of a steadfast mind. **2B3 of quality, one who does not hesitate, does not waiver.**²

the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

[Ephesians 4:14 ESV](#)

so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every..

WORD WEALTH

6:11 stand against, *anthistemi* (anth-is-tay-mee); Strong’s #436: Compare “antihistamine.” From *anti*, “against,” and *histemi*, “to cause to stand.”

The verb suggests vigorously opposing, bravely resisting, standing face-to-face against an adversary, standing your ground. Just as an antihistamine puts a block on histamine, *anthistemi* tells us that with the authority and spiritual weapons granted to us we can withstand evil forces.³

11. Whole armor (πανοπλίαν). *Panoply* is a transcript of the Greek word. Only here, ver. 13, and Luke 11:22, see note. In classical Greek of the **full armor of a heavy-armed soldier**. The student may compare the description of the forging of Aeneas’ armor by Vulcan (Virgil, “Aeneid,” viii., 415–459), and of the armor itself as displayed to Aeneas by Venus (“Aeneid,” viii., 616–730). Also of the armor of Achilles (Homer, “Iliad,” xviii., 468–617).

Wiles (μεθοδεΐας). See on ch. 4:14. **The armor is a defence against strategy as well as assault.**

The devil (τοῦ διαβόλου). See on Matt. 4:1; John 6:70. In Job and Zechariah used as the equivalent of *Satan* (**hater or accuser**, see on Luke 10:18), of a single person, **the enemy of mankind**. In the other Old-Testament passages in which it occurs, it is used to translate either *Satan* or its equivalent in meaning, *tsar* (**adversary, distresser**), but without the same reference to that single person. See Sept., 1 Chron. 21:1; Esther 7:4; 8:1; Ps. 108:6; Numb. 22:32. The Septuagint usage implies enmity in general, without accusation either true or false. In the New Testament invariably as a proper name, except in the Pastoral Epistles, where it has its ordinary meaning **slandorous**. See 1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 2:3. As a proper name it is used in the Septuagint sense as the equivalent of *Satan*, and **meaning enemy**.⁴

Put on the whole armor (all things weapon), of God for to be able you to stand against the wiles (defense and assault) of the Devil (enemy, hater, accuser, slanderer).

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

² Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

³ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 6:10). Thomas Nelson.

⁴ Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 3, pp. 405–406). Charles Scribner’s Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,*

[Ephesians 1:21](#) [ESV](#)

far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not...

against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over

[Ephesians 2:2](#) [ESV](#)

in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power...

this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil

[Ephesians 3:10](#) [ESV](#)

so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and..

in the heavenly places.

[Ephesians 1:3](#) [ESV](#)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every...

12. **We wrestle** (ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη). Rev., more literally and correctly, **our wrestling is**. Πάλη *wrestling*, only here.

Flesh and blood. The Greek reverses the order.

Principalities and powers. See on Col. 1:16.

Rulers of the darkness of this world (κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου). Rev., more correctly, *world-rulers of this darkness*. *World-rulers* only here. Compare John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4.

Spiritual wickedness (τὰ πνευματικά τῆς πονηρίας). Lit., *the spiritual things of wickedness*. Rev., *spiritual hosts of wickedness*. The phrase is collective, of the **evil powers viewed as a body**. *Wickedness is active evil, mischief*. Hence Satan is called ὁ πονηρός *the wicked one*. See on Luke 3:19; 7:21; 1 John 2:13.

In high places (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις). Rev., more literally, *in the heavenly places*. Used in the general sense of *the sky* or *air*. See on ch. 2:2.⁵

“Because not is to us wrestling [our wrestling] against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness age, against the spiritual (powers) things of active evil(wickedness) in the heavenlies.”

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

13 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*

[Ephesians 5:16](#) [ESV](#)

making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

13. **Wherefore.** Because the fight is with such powers.

Take unto you (ἀναλάβετε). Lit., *take up*, as one takes up armor to put it on. So Rev.

The whole armor. An interesting parallel passage, evidently founded upon this, occurs in Ignatius' Epistle to Polycarp, 6 “Please the captain under whom ye serve, from whom also ye shall receive your wages. Let no one of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism abide as your shield; your faith as your

⁵ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 406–407). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

helmets; your love as your spear; your patience as your whole armor. Let your good works be your savings (τὰ δεπόςαιτα *deposita*),* that you may receive what is justly to your credit.” Gibbon relates how the relaxation of discipline and the disuse of exercise rendered the soldiers less willing and less able to support the fatigues of the service. They complained of the weight of their armor, and successively obtained permission to lay aside their cuirasses and helmets (ch. 27).

Withstand. *With* has the sense of *against*, as appears in the older English *withsay*, *to contradict*; Anglo-Saxon, *widstandan*, *to resist*. Compare German, *wider* and *Widerstand*, *resistance*.

Having done all. Everything which the crisis demands.⁶

Because the fight is with such powers, take up (put on..activity/exercise) the whole armor of God, that you be able to resist (withstand against) in the day evil, and all things having worked out (everything the crisis demands) to stand (confirm in spiritual knowledge and power).

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

14 Stand therefore, (Z) having fastened on the belt of truth,

[1 Peter 1:13 ESV](#)

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the...

[Isaiah 11:5 ESV](#)

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

[Luke 12:35 ESV](#)

“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,

14. **Having your loins girt about** (περιζωσάμενοι τὴν ὀσφύν). The verb is middle, not passive. Rev., correctly, *having girded*. Compare Isa. 11:5. The principal terms in this description of the christian armor are taken from the Septuagint of Isaiah.

Truth (ἀληθεία). The state of the heart answering to God’s truth; inward, practical acknowledgment of the truth as it is in Him: the agreement of our convictions with God’s revelation.

The loins encircled by the girdle form the central point of the physical system. Hence, in Scripture, the loins are described as **the seat of power**. “To smite through the loins” is to strike a fatal blow. “To lay affliction upon the loins” is to afflict heavily. Here was the point of junction for the main pieces of the body-armor, so that the girdle formed the common bond of the whole. **Truth gives unity to the different virtues**, and determinateness and consistency to character. **All the virtues are exercised within the sphere of truth.**

and (AA) having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

[Isaiah 59:17 ESV](#)

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on...

[1 Thessalonians 5:8 ESV](#)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and...

[Isaiah 61:10 ESV](#)

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with...

[2 Corinthians 6:7 ESV](#)

by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand...

⁶ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, p. 407). Charles Scribner’s Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Breastplate of righteousness (θώρακα τῆς δικαιοσύνης). Compare Isa. 59:17. *Righteousness* is used here in the sense of *moral rectitude*. In 1 Thess. 5:8, the breastplate is described as of *faith and love*. Homer speaks of light-armed warriors armed with linen **corselets**; and these were worn to much later times by Asiatic soldiers, and were occasionally adopted by the Romans. Thus Suetonius says of Galba, that on the day on which he was slain by Otho's soldiers, he put on a linen corselet, though aware that it would avail little against the enemy's daggers ("Galba," xix.). Horn was used for this purpose by some of the barbarous nations. It was cut into small pieces, which were fastened like scales upon linen shirts. Later, the corselet of metal scales fastened upon leather or linen, or of flexible bands of steel folding over each other, was introduced. They appear on Roman monuments of the times of the emperors. The Roman spearmen wore cuirasses of chain-mail. Virgil mentions those in which the linked rings were of gold ("Aeneid," iii., 467). The stiff cuirass called στάδιος *standing upright*, because, when placed upon its lower edge it stood erect, consisted of two parts: the breastplate, made of hard leather, bronze, or iron, and a corresponding plate covering the back. They were connected by leathern straps or metal bands passing over the shoulders and fastened in front, and by hinges on the right side. The breastplate covers the vital parts, as the heart.⁷

Stand, therefore, having girded about the loins (your core, your center, your seat of power) of you with truth (the unifier/fuse of the armor)(loving the truth, speaking the truth), and putting on the breastplate (chainmail- armor for the body, as, the body breastplate and backpiece taken together) of righteousness (integrity, rectitude, goodness, equity of character) .

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

15 and, ^(AB)as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

[Isaiah 52:7 ESV](#)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace,...

[Romans 10:15 ESV](#)

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet..."

[Exodus 12:11 ESV](#)

In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your...

15. **Preparation** (ἑτοιμασία). Only here in the New Testament. The Roman soldier substituted for the *greaves* of the Greek (metal plates covering the lower part of the leg) the *caligae* or *sandals*, bound by thongs over the instep and round the ankle, and having the soles thickly studded with nails. They were not worn by the superior officers, so that the common soldiers were distinguished as *caligati*. ἑτοιμασία means *readiness*; but in Hellenistic Greek it was sometimes used in the sense of *establishment* or *firm foundation*, which would suit this passage: *firm-footing*. Compare Isa. 52:7.⁸

And having shod (bind under) the feet with (the)preparation (readiness, established, firm footing – LIVE READY) of the gospel of peace (peacemaker, peaceable).

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

⁷ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 407–408). Charles Scribner's Sons.

⁸ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, p. 409). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

16 In all circumstances take up ^(AC)the shield of faith,

[1 John 5:4 ESV](#)

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has...

with which you can extinguish all ^(AD)the flaming darts

[Psalm 120:4 ESV](#)

A warrior's sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!

of ^(AE)the evil one;

[Matthew 13:19 ESV](#)

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and...

16. **Above all** (ἐπὶ πάντων). Ambiguous. It may mean *over* all, or *in addition to* all. The latter is correct. Rev., *withal*.

The shield of faith (τὸν θυρεὸν τῆς πίστεως). *Θυρεὸν shield*, is from *θύρα door*, because shaped like a door. Homer uses the word for *that which is placed in front of the doorway*. Thus of the stone placed by Polyphemus in front of his cave ("Odyssey," ix., 240). The shield here described is that of the heavy infantry; a large, oblong shield, four by two and a half feet, and sometimes curved on the inner side. Sculptured representations may be seen on Trajan's column. Compare "*Compass him as with a shield*," Ps. 5:12. It was made of wood or of wicker-work, and held on the left arm by means of a handle. Xenophon describes troops, supposed to be Egyptians, with wooden shields reaching to their feet ("Anabasis," i., 8, 9). *Saving* faith is meant.

Fiery darts (τὰ βέλη τὰ πεπυρωμένα). Lit., *the darts, those which have been set on fire*. Herodotus says that the Persians attacked the citadel of Athens "with arrows whereto pieces of lighted tow were attached, which they shot at the barricade" (8:52). Thucydides: "The Plataeans constructed a wooden frame, which they set up on the top of their own wall opposite the mound.... They also hung curtains of skins and hides in front: these were designed to protect the woodwork and the workers, and shield them against blazing arrows" (2:75). Livy tells of a huge dart used at the siege of Saguntum, which was impelled by twisted ropes. "There was used by the Saguntines a missile weapon called *falarica*, with the shaft of fir, and round in other parts, except toward the point, whence the iron projected. This part, which was square, they bound around with tow and besmeared with pitch. It had an iron head three feet in length, so that it could pierce through the body with the armor. But what caused the greatest fear was that this weapon, even though it stuck in the shield and did not penetrate into the body, when it was discharged with the middle part on fire, and bore along a much greater flame produced by the mere motion, obliged the armor to be thrown down, and exposed the soldier to succeeding blows" (21:8). Again, of the siege of Ambracia by the Romans: "Some advanced with burning torches, others carrying tow and pitch and fire-darts, their entire line being illuminated by the blaze" (38:6). Compare Ps. 7:13, where the correct rendering is, "His arrows He maketh fiery arrows." **Temptation is thus represented as impelled from a distance. Satan attacks by indirection—through good things from which no evil is suspected.** There is a hint of its propagating power: one sin draws another in its track: the flame of the fire-tipped dart spreads. **Temptation acts on susceptible material. Self-confidence is combustible. Faith, in doing away with dependence on self, takes away fuel for the dart. It creates sensitiveness to holy influences by which the power of temptation is neutralized. It enlists the direct aid of God.** See 1 Cor. 10:13; Luke 22:32; Jas. 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:12; 2 Pet. 2:9.⁹

**Above all, having taken up (put on) the shield (large, as door shaped) of faith (persuasion),
by which you will be able all the darts of the one having been
made fiery (unquenchable) to quench.**

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

⁹ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 409–410). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

17 and take (AF) the helmet of salvation, and

[Isaiah 59:17 ESV](#)

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on...

[1 Thessalonians 5:8 ESV](#)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and...

[Isaiah 61:10 ESV](#)

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garment of salvation...

[2 Corinthians 6:7 ESV](#)

by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand...

Helmet: the **protection of the soul** which consists in (the hope of) salvation¹⁰

Salvation: **4992 σωτήριον, σωτήριος** [*soterion /so-tay-ree-on/*] adj. Neuter of the same as 4991 as (properly, concretely) noun; TDNT 7:1021; TDNTA 1132; GK 5402 and 5403; Five occurrences; AV translates as “salvation” four times, and “that brings salvation” once. **1** saving, bringing salvation. **2** he who embodies this salvation, or through whom God is about to achieve it. **3** the hope of (future) salvation.¹¹

17. Take the helmet of salvation (τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τοῦ σωτηρίου δέξασθε). Compare Isa. 59:17; 1 Thess. 5:8. *Take* is a different word from that used in vv. 13, 16. It is *receive* as from God. The meaning is *the helmet which is salvation*. The protection for *the head*. The helmet was originally of skin, strengthened with bronze or other metal, and surmounted with a figure adorned with a horsehair crest. It was furnished with a visor to protect the face.

(AG) the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God,

[Hebrews 4:12 ESV](#)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the...

[Isaiah 49:2 ESV](#)

He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished...

[Hosea 6:5 ESV](#)

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my...

[2 Corinthians 6:7 ESV](#)

by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand...

Sword of the Spirit (μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεύματος). See on Apoc. 6:4. The word of God serves both for attack and to parry the thrusts of the enemy. Thus Christ used it in His temptation. It is the sword *of the Spirit*, because the Spirit of God gives it and inspires it. The Spirit's aid is needed for its interpretation. Compare John 14:10; Heb. 4:12, in which latter passage the image is sacrificial.

Sword 3162 μάχαιρα [*machaira /makh-ah-ee-rah/*] n f. From a presumed derivative of 3163; TDNT 4:524; TDNTA 572; GK 3479; 29 occurrences; AV translates as “sword” 29 times. **1** a large knife, used for killing animals and cutting up flesh. **2** a small sword, as distinguished from a large sword. 2A curved sword, for a cutting stroke. 2B a straight sword, for thrusting.¹²

Word of God (ῥῆμα θεοῦ). See on Luke 1:37. See Luke 3:2; 4:4; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 6:5; 11:3.¹³

¹⁰ Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

¹¹ Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

¹² Strong, J. (1995). In *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

¹³ Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 3, pp. 410–411). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

17 And the helmet of salvation take, and

**Receive as from God the helmet which is salvation
And God's Word
To attack and deflect/block/circumvent/avoid
The enemy's thrusts**

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

18 praying ^(AH) at all times (prayer = worship)

[Luke 18:1 ESV](#)

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

^(AD) in the Spirit,

[Jude 20 ESV](#)

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,

[Romans 8:26 ESV](#)

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought,...

^(AD) with all prayer and supplication.

[Colossians 4:2-4 ESV](#)

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray...

To that end, ^(AB) keep alert with all perseverance,

[Mark 13:33 ESV](#)

Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

making ^(AL) supplication for all the saints,

[1 Timothy 2:1 ESV](#)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made...

18. **Always** (ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ). Incorrect. It means *on every occasion*. Rev., *at all seasons*. Compare Luke 21:36.

With all prayer and supplication (διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς). *Prayer* is general, *supplication* special. Διὰ *with* is literally *through*; that is, *through the medium of*. *All*, lit., *every*. Prayer is of various kinds, formal, silent, vocal, secret, public, petitionary, ejaculatory—shot upward like a dart (*jaculum*) on a sudden emergency. Compare Ps. 5:1, 2.

Watching thereunto (εἰς αὐτὸ ἀγρυπνοῦντες). Compare Col. 4:2. For *watching*, see on Mark 13:33, 35. *Thereunto*, unto prayer, for occasions of prayer, and to maintain the spirit of prayer. One must watch *before* prayer, *in* prayer, *after* prayer.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Perseverance (προσκατερήσει). Only here. The kindred verb προσκατερέω *to continue*, occurs often. See on Acts 1:14.¹⁴

18 the sword of the Spirit, which is (the)word of God via all prayer and petition, praying at every time in (the) Spirit , and to same thing this watching in all

**ON EVERY OCCASION through prayer WATCHING (Mk. 13:33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 35 Stay awake!)
CONTINUE!!!! (Grit 😊)**

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

19 and (AM) also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my

[Colossians 4:3 ESV](#)

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the...

[1 Thessalonians 5:25 ESV](#)

Brothers, pray for us.

[2 Thessalonians 3:1 ESV](#)

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as...

[Isaiah 50:4 ESV](#)

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain...

Mouth (AN) boldly to proclaim

[Acts 4:29 ESV](#)

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word...

the mystery of the gospel,

[Ephesians 3:3 ESV](#)

how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

19. **Boldly.** Connect with *to make known*, as Rev.; not with *open my mouth*, as A. V.

Mystery. See on Rom. 11:25; Col. 1:26.¹⁵

19 perseverance and petition concerning all the saints, and for me, that to me may be given speech in opening of the mouth of me in boldness, to make known the mystery of the gospel ,

Fill my mouth with: The Mystery of the Gospel – to make it KNOWN.

WHAT DOES THIS MOTIVATE ME TO DO?

¹⁴ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, p. 411). Charles Scribner's Sons.

¹⁵ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, p. 411). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

[2 Corinthians 5:20](#) [ESV](#)

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on...

20. I am an ambassador in bonds (πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει). **The verb to be an ambassador occurs only here and 2 Cor. 5:20.** See on Philem. 9. *In bonds*, lit., *in a chain*: the particular word for the *coupling-chain* by which he was bound to the hand of his guard.¹⁶

20 for which I am an ambassador in a chain, that in it I may speak boldly as it behoves me to speak.

AMBAS'SADOR, *noun* [This is the more common orthography; but good authors write also ambassador; and as the orthography of embassy is established, it would be better to write ambassador.]

EMBAS'SADOR, *noun*

1. A minister of the highest rank employed by one prince or state, **at the court of another**, to manage the public concerns of his own prince or state, and representing the power and dignity of his sovereign. Ambassadors are ordinary, when they reside permanently at a foreign court; or extraordinary, when they are sent on a special occasion. They are also called ministers. Envoys are ministers employed on special occasions, and are of less dignity.

Final Greetings

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, **Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.**

[Colossians 4:7-9](#) [ESV](#) Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister...

[Acts 20:4](#) [ESV](#) Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and...

[2 Timothy 4:12](#) [ESV](#) Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

[Titus 3:12](#) [ESV](#) When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have...

21. **That ye also may know**, etc. Compare Cicero to Atticus: "Send us some letter-carrier, that both you may know how it goes with us, and that we may know how you fare and what you are going to do" (5:18).

Tychicus. See on Col. 4:7.

A beloved brother. Rev., correctly, *the* beloved brother. Tychicus is referred to as well known.¹⁷

21 that now may know also you the things about me, what I am doing, all things to you will make known Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful

²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may **encourage** your hearts.

[Colossians 2:2](#) [ESV](#)

that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of...

22 minister in (the) Lord whom I sent to you for this same thing, that you may know the things about us, and may comfort the hearts of you.

¹⁶ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, p. 411). Charles Scribner's Sons.

¹⁷ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 411–412). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

²³ *Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

[Galatians 6:16 ESV](#)

And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

[2 Thessalonians 3:16 ESV](#)

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you...

[1 Peter 5:14 ESV](#)

Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

23 Peace to the brothers and love with faith from God

²⁴ *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible .*

[1 Corinthians 16:22 ESV](#)

If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! [MARANATHA!]

24. **In sincerity** (ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ). Rev., correctly, *in incorruptness*: who love Christ with an imperishable and incorruptible love.¹⁸

24 (the) Father and (the) Lord Jesus Christ. Grace (be) with all those loving the Lord of us, Jesus Christ in incorruptibility.

¹⁸ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [Word studies in the New Testament](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 412–413). Charles Scribner's Sons.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

NOTES

TYCHICUS (Τυχικός, *Tychikos*). A believer from Asia Minor (Acts 20:4) and contemporary of Paul.

Tychicus in Acts

In Acts 20:1–6, Tychicus is listed among a larger group of believers, including Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy and Trophimus. In Acts 20:4, Tychicus and Trophimus are further described in most manuscripts as being from Asia Minor. However, Codex Bezae (D) has “and the Ephesians, Eutychus, and Trophimus” instead of “and the Asians, Tychicus, and Trophimus.” This is a minority reading and is generally not accepted. Acts 20:5 mentions “these” who went on ahead—likely referring to Tychicus and Trophimus, not the larger group (Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 666).

Tychicus in Paul’s Letters

Tychicus is mentioned in the closing paragraphs of four of Paul’s letters:

- (Eph 6:21) After introducing Tychicus as a messenger who will relate Paul’s latest activities, Paul refers to him as “my beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.”
- (Eph 6:21–22) Tychicus is described as one who will tell them everything and encourage their hearts.
- (Col 4:7) Tychicus is again described as a “beloved brother and faithful minister.” In this verse, he is also a “fellow servant.”
- (Col 4:8) Paul describes Tychicus’ purpose to inform the Colossians of his activities and to “encourage their hearts.”

The similar language in Eph 6:21–2 and Col 4:7–8 may support a textual relationship between Ephesians and Colossians. One author would probably use similar language to describe the same person, particularly in a close temporal succession.

Tychicus in the Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral Letters mention Tychicus twice:

- (Titus 3:12) Paul tells Titus that either Tychicus or Artemas will arrive to relieve him
- (2 Tim 4:12) Tychicus has been sent to Ephesus, likely to relieve Timothy.

Chronology is important in understanding the references to Tychicus in the Pastoral Letters. The composition order is likely 1 Timothy, Titus, then 2 Timothy. In Titus 3:12, Paul is uncertain whether he will send Tychicus or Artemas to Crete. In 2 Timothy 4:12, Artemas was probably sent to Crete, allowing Tychicus to be sent to Ephesus as Timothy’s replacement.

Tychicus in Corinthians

Second Corinthians 8:18 describes: “With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.” Tychicus may be “the brother” from 2 Cor 8:18. Lightfoot argues: “It is probable indeed that Tychicus, together with others mentioned among St Paul’s numerous retinue on this occasion, was a delegate appointed by his own church according to the Apostle’s injunctions (1 Cor 16:3, 4) to bear the contributions of his brethren to the poor Christians of Judaea; and if so, he may possibly be the person commended as the brother οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν (*hou ho epainos en tō euangeliō dia pasōn tōn ekklesiōn*) (2 Cor 8:18): but this will depend on the interpretation of the best supported reading in Acts 20:5 οὗτοι δὲ προσελθόντες ἔμενον ἡμᾶς ἐν Τρωάδι (*houtoi de proselthontes emenon hēmas en Trōadi*)” (Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles*, 231–32).¹⁹

¹⁹ Brannan, R. (2016). [Tychicus](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Kloppenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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
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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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*



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 heavenlies. 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). 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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 *katēgazomai* 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 *katēgazomai* 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).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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*.

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).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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.,



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 *ḥereb*, the term for “sword” used in such important divine warfare texts as 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

“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;
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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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). 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,



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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; 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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

Isa. 59:17

*Wisd. of Sol. 5:17–1 Thess. 5:8
20a*

Eph. 6:14–17

panoply or whole
armor

panoply or whole
armor

girdle of truth

breastplate of righteousness/justice of breastplate of righteousness/justice and love of faithbreastplate of righteousness/justice

shoes of the runner of
peace

shield of faith or
faithfulness

helmet of salvation helmet of justice of impartialhelmet of the hope of salvation of helmet of salvation

sword of stern wrath

sword of the Spirit, the
word of God



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

clothed with the
garments of
vengeance and wrath

(next, in 59:19, natural phenomena: wind, creation as ally in river)
(next, in 5:20b–23, warfare: lightning, hail, sea, rivers, wind)

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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., Gniska: 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 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.

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 many 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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

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).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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!²⁰

²⁰ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 269–321). Herald Press.



51

Ephesians 6

Our next passage is one of the best known in all of Scripture, Ephesians 6:10–20. In this passage the apostle Paul is not writing about demonization but about warfare between the power of the Devil and power of God in the life of believers.

The conviction that Ephesians 6 is *the* manual on victorious spiritual warfare is not new to our age. All through the history of the church, believers, both theologians and lay Christians, have turned to this passage for help, especially in those hours when all the powers of hell seem to have been released against them.

The church fathers continually referred to this passage. A look at the Scripture indexes for the writing of the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers will reveal how often they turned to these words of Paul. Ephesians 6 was also commented on continually by the great Puritan divines.

First, I want to examine the passage critically. This will mean a somewhat in-depth and almost word-by-word study, where necessary and if space permits. Second, I want to be pastoral. How does Paul's teaching about the spirit world here affect our Christian life? How do we put it into practice? Third, I want to focus on evangelism. How does Paul's teaching enlighten us in the effective evangelization of those blinded by evil spirits against the truth of the Gospel?

In Ephesians 6:10–20 *Paul is bringing together all of his warfare teachings*. He has brought his readers to the point where they are now ready for his most important teaching on warfare in the entire epistle. Here is the practical application of all he has been saying in Ephesians until now. As Arnold says, Ephesians 6 is Paul's "call to acquire divine strengthening for the purpose of engaging the spirit-forces of evil (Eph. 6:10–20). It is not an irrelevant appendix to the epistle. It is a crucial part of the paraenesis to which the rest of the epistle has been pointing."

Arnold next makes an important comment. He says that this

is the only place in the Pauline corpus where believers are explicitly called upon to struggle against the "principalities and powers." The "struggle" is not merely mentioned as a parenthetical aside. It is taken up by the author and elaborated on in ten verses integrally connected with the foregoing paraenesis of the epistle. (4:1–6:9)

He concludes saying that in the 6:10–20 passage we discover again Paul's "significant emphasis on power." It is brought about "by the author's perception of a 'spiritual warfare' in which the readers are already engaged. This concept is present in Paul, but it is never elaborated to the degree that it is here."

Arnold then asks the question why there is such a unique emphasis on cosmic level spiritual warfare in Ephesians. The answers Arnold gives all relate directly to the spirit-magic-occult lifestyle of Ephesus and the surrounding region, centered in the worship of Artemis and the saturation of the culture of Asia Minor (indeed of the Greco-Roman world) with magic, occult, spirit practices.

Ephesians 6:10–20



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Paul begins his presentation with “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (v. 10).

The word “finally” here is *tou loipou* in Greek, a common expression in Paul’s epistles, which literally means “for the rest.”

I believe it would be accurate to paraphrase Paul’s words to this point something like this:

“First, I told you about your election of God (1:3–2:27) and that the Lord Jesus already reigns as Lord at the Father’s right hand, above all the cosmic forces of evil you are facing. I have also said that you are raised up with him and are seated with him in the heavenlies.

“Furthermore, you have been given the task of declaring to the principalities and powers the eternal plan of God, and to bring them into submission to the Lord by exercising your delegated authority in union with Christ.

“To do this, you have been given the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Christ Himself dwells in you. You are one body in Christ.

“Now, let me put all of this in perspective. The Devil and the evil powers which war against you, while defeated by the Lord Jesus, are still free to continue to assault you, over and over again.

“There is no need to fear, however. Jesus alone is Lord. You have victory in Him. You are co-regents in the heavenlies in Him.

“You need to learn how to be strong in Him, however. While the Enemy will attack, God has provided all you need to be victorious Christian soldiers. Let me tell you how all of this is to be worked out in daily life.”

“Finally” is followed immediately by three imperatives: be empowered (v. 10); put on (v. 11); and take up (v. 13). The last two refer directly to the armor of God.

The three imperatives, Arnold says, “are similar in meaning . . . (They) emphasize the need for divine strength in order to resist the enemy.”

Arnold says Paul’s use of the conjunction, *oun* (“therefore,” vv. 13, 14) introduces the main admonition in verse 14 by making a general reference to the need for divine power because of the supernatural, powerful, and cunning nature of the enemies,” revealed in verse 12. He states that “verse 12 functions as an explication of the nature of the enemy and not as the central element in the development of 6:10–20” as some commentators suggest.

Arnold gives great importance to verse 14.

The imperative *stete* (“stand firm,” v. 14) has been accurately described as the chief admonition of the passage. The admonition to acquire divine strengthening and enablement has not been given by the author as an end in itself. The strength is required for a particular purpose—that the believer might be enabled to stand against the evil “powers” and successfully resist them (vv. 11, 13, 14). “Stand firm” (v. 14) then becomes the central command of the passage.

Stand Firm

After Paul gives his main command, “Stand firm” (v. 14), he follows with four imperative participles in verses 14–16: *perizōsamēnoi*, “girding about, around”; *endusamēnoi*, “putting on”; *hupodēsamēnoi*, literally “shoeing”; and *analabontes*, “taking up.”

These four are followed by the second imperative verb in the series, *analabete*, from *analambanō*, to “take up” (v. 13). Vine says it means to “receive by deliberate and ready reception of what is offered . . . taking with the hand, taking hold, taking hold of.”

Arnold writes that these commands do not introduce an independent series of admonitions. They are all dependent on *stete*, “stand firm” (v. 14).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

The whole of verses 14–20, then, is dependent on the main thought of verse 14—“stand!” All other thoughts are subservient to this ultimate aim. The divine armor and power are provided for the attainment of this goal. The opponents are carefully delineated so that the reader may know the nature of the enemies to be withstood. Even prayer is given with the goal of resistance in mind.

Be Strengthened

With this overview as the foundation we go back to where Paul begins in verse 10a, “Be strong.” Lincoln says Paul’s use of a passive command here reinforces the notion that “strength is to be drawn from an external source and corresponding to the passive in the prayer of 3:16. ‘Be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.’” He continues saying that here “the external source is ‘the Lord,’ and the wording is again reminiscent of the Old Testament (cf. 1 Sam. 30:6; ‘David strengthened himself in the Lord his God’; Zech. 10:12. ‘I will make them strong in the Lord.’)”

Arnold comments on 6:10 on the believer’s source of power in the Lord. He says this “phrase not only describes the person with whom the readers have been brought into union, but also refers to the sphere or new set of conditions in which they live, into the domain of light (5:8ff); they are no longer subjected to the tyranny of life under the control of the prince of the authority of the air (2:2) but now live under the loving headship of Christ who is Lord.”

He then says “Grundmann has fittingly commented, ‘This place [in Christ] is to a great extent charged with the superior power which belongs to Christ.’ For this reason the readers can be admonished to ‘be strong.’”

With this in mind, Arnold writes that the source of the strength “is more specifically defined as existing in ‘the strength of the Lord’s might.’” These are the “same terms the author used to describe the divine power which brought about the resurrection and exaltation of Christ (1:19–20).” Thus, he says, Paul “affirms that believers have access to this vast divine power which has already proved itself sufficient to overcome powerful diabolic opposition.”

Continuing with 6:10, we note the two power terms *kratos*, “might,” and *ischus*, “strength.” Arnold states that they “are linked in one place in Isaiah (40:26), which the author may have been thinking of as he penned 6:10.”

Arnold then says Paul “appears significantly indebted to Isaiah for many of his terms and metaphors, particularly with respect to the armor.” Both Arnold and Lincoln continually refer to Paul’s use of the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah, in all warfare imagery of Ephesians 6. Arnold states that the one Old Testament passage that stands out as having a significant correspondence to Ephesians 6:10ff is Isaiah 52.

Arnold comments that “the extended similarity of ideas throughout the wider context of Isaiah 52 with Ephesians (especially chap. 6) suggests that our author thought of the entire Isaianic passage as he wrote.”

The Enemy We Face

After appealing for believers to strengthen themselves with the Lord’s strength and might by putting on God’s armor, Paul comes forth with the rationale behind his battle cry in verses 11–12. He says that

1. They need “to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (v. 11d).
2. They are not facing human foes (v. 12a).
3. They are facing a complex spiritual army-hierarchy of evil supernatural beings who have thoroughly infiltrated the heavens and exercises great control over the earth (v. 12b).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

The “stand firm” of verse 14 is a repetition of his two prior “stand firm” statements (v. 11b and 13b). This repetition of “stand firm” three times strengthens the view that it is the central command around which all else flows. Eadie says the construction in Greek of “stand firm against” (v. 11b) is a military phrase “to stand in front of with the view of opposing.” He cites secular sources revealing this use. Thus it fits well the “for and against” military symbolism of Paul in these verses.

This military stance is not directed against men but against the Devil and his high level cosmic demonic powers, Paul says (vv. 11–12). His reference to the believer’s principal cosmic enemy by the name “the devil” here (v. 11) and in 4:27 is unique to his writings. He only uses “the devil” here and in Hebrews 2:14. Paul’s most frequently used title for the devil is “Satan.” He also uses “the evil one” here (v. 16) and in 2 Thessalonians 3:3. He uses “the serpent” in 2 Corinthians 11:3 and “the god of this world” in 2 Corinthians 4:3–4. Then there is “Belial” in 2 Corinthians 6:15 and “the tempter” in 1 Thessalonians 3:5. In addition, of course, are all the power words for principalities and powers which would also include the Devil since he is the chief cosmic evil principality.

We not only face the Devil, but we must also contend with his schemes (6:11). “Schemes (“wiles” in the KJV) is the Greek word *methodia*. It is always used in a negative manner in the New Testament. Vine says it means

craft, deceit (*meta*, after, *hodos*, away), a cunning device, a wile, and is translated “wiles (of error) in Ephesians 4:14 [A.V.] paraphrases it, “they lie in wait (to deceive),” . . . (with a view to) the craft (singular) of deceit.

The idea behind *methodia* is deception. The apostle is warning us that the devil’s entire system of warfare against us is based on deception. Eadie makes an excellent observation at this point. He says that the Devil has a method of warfare peculiar to himself, for it consists of “wiles.” His battles are the rush of a sudden ambush. He fights not on a pitched field, but by sudden assault and secret and cunning onslaught.

The Enemies We Face

Verse 12 is without doubt one of the most remarkable verses in the entire Bible on spiritual warfare. Paul says we struggle against high level, cosmic principalities and powers of total evil. The word for “struggle” is *palē*, a wrestling. This is the only appearance of the word in the New Testament. Wuest remarks that this Greek athletic term refers to a

contest between two in which each endeavors to throw the other . . . When we consider that the loser in a Greek wrestling contest had his eyes gorged out with resulting blindness for the rest of his days, we can form some conception of the Ephesian Greeks’ reaction to Paul’s illustration. The Christian wrestling against the powers of darkness is no less desperate and fateful.

Paul’s switch from the imagery of the soldier to that of the wrestler and then back to the soldier again should not be considered surprising. At times, in hand-to-hand combat, the soldier is also a wrestler. Paul probably used the wrestler imagery primarily to bring out that point.

Up until now the apostle has been talking in general of the evil principalities and powers. First, in 1:21 he gives a five-fold classification of the powers: rule, authority, power, dominion, and name. Next, in 4:8 he refers to “captivity” (KJV), evidently also an evil power concept. Then, in Ephesians 3:10 Paul mentions “rulers and authorities,” and in 4:27 he mentions the devil for the first time. Now in Ephesians 6, Paul unites the Devil (v. 11), the Evil One (v. 16), and the rulers and the powers (v. 12) all together. For the very first time Paul clearly states what he has



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

already implied, that our battle against the Devil is *not* with him personally or individually. It is with him only as he operates against us *through* evil, high-level, cosmic principalities and powers.

This is the third time in Ephesians the apostle uses his two primary summary words for the evil principalities and powers: *archai*, “rulers,” and *exousia*, “authorities” (1:20 and 3:10). I like John Eadie’s observation on Ephesians 1:21, where these two words are first used in Ephesians along with *dunameos*, “might,” and *kuristetos*, “lordship.” He says “what the distinction of the words among themselves is, and what degrees of celestial heraldry they describe, it is impossible for us to define.”

That is a good statement. He recognizes that Paul is not being technical. He is simply heaping up words to describe the massive and complex hierarchy of evil supernaturalism with which the believer is at war. The same is true of 6:12. Eadie’s further observations strongly support this more flexible view of these power concepts. He says the order of power in 1:21, with *archē* and *exousia* listed first as they are in 6:12 also, is reversed in Colossians 1:16. There the two are listed last. He then mentions that the last power term in 1:21, *kuriotētos*, is listed second in Colossians 1:16.

Eadie then makes an interesting comment about a possible connection between the four power terms as first used in 1:21. He says, “Whoever possesses the *archē* enjoys and displays *exousia*, and whoever is invested with the *dunamis*, wields it in his appointed *kuriotēs*.”

The apostle follows rulers and powers with a phrase which is not used anywhere else in the New Testament or in the LXX: *tous kosmokratoras tou skotous toutou*, “the world rulers of this darkness” (*Greek-English New Testament*). Arnold attempts to trace the origin of this unique phrase as do other critical commentators. Many come to the same conclusion that Arnold does, that Paul did *not* create this phrase, but only borrowed it out of the world in which these believers lived. Arnold says the evidence suggests it was “current in both the magical tradition and world of astrology when the author wrote this epistle.”

The term occurs a number of times in the magical papyri, “used as one of a number of descriptive titles for various gods/spirits called upon to aid the conjurer, . . . [and] as one of the many titles of the deity Helios.” Arnold outlines some of the results of his extensive research into the religious use of this phrase in the first century B.C. He says that “the employment of *kosmokratōr* appears to be a clear example of the Ephesians’ author utilizing a term from the magical/astrological tradition. It is also a likely candidate for being one of ‘the names which are named’ (1:21).”

Next Arnold states that “the author reinterprets the meaning of *kosmokratōr* for the Christian readers. There is not one, but many (the term is plural).” He says that the “*kosmokratōr* is not considered omnipotent, but is placed alongside the principalities and ‘powers’ under the leadership of the devil! Far from being beneficial or helpful deities, the *kosmokratores* are regarded as evil spirits (*pneumatika*) of ‘this darkness.’ ”

Arnold next says that “the way the term is used in this context may serve as the author’s interpretation of the Ephesian Artemis.” It could also include Helios, Sarapis, or other deities claiming to possess cosmic power.

Thus, believers who formerly worshipped Artemis or adhered to magical practices now have Paul’s instruction about how they are to look at the deities or spirits in which they once put their faith. Arnold says the pagan deities “are powerful and evil emissaries of the devil himself who need to be resisted with the powerful armor of God.”



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

This reminds us of Paul's treatment of idols and their demons in 1 Corinthians 10:20–21: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons [*daimonia*], and not to God; and I do not want you to become a sharer in demons." Arnold makes a clear connection between idols and the spirits in Ephesians 6. He then notes that "Paul believed that a Corinthian believer would actually be joined with demonic 'powers' if he became involved in the table fellowship of pagan deities. . . . An offering brought to them brought one under the influence of demonic 'powers.' This was because the heathen cults were the instruments of the kingdom of Satan."

Next Arnold points out that "this close association of pagan gods with 'demons' is also found in the LXX. Psalms 95:5 reads: 'For all the gods of the Gentiles are demons' (see also Deut. 32:7; Baraita 4:7; Jub. 22:16–17). The identification of the gods of the heathen with demons became even more explicit in later Judaism."

If Paul were writing these words directly to our Western religious context today, what would he say? Today we have demons of materialism, intellectualism, self-worship, the pursuit of power, position, pleasure, and possessions. In the religious realm, we have everything they had except for the physical temple of Artemis. Taking its place, however, are the many material temples plus the mystical temple of the New Age movement. The baser, grosser sides of the religious spirit world found among the magical practitioners of Paul's day is replicated in modern occultism and Satanism rapidly spreading in our world. A powerful minority is committed to unspeakable, religious, satanic evil.

In the Two-thirds World, the gods of the non-Christians are very similar to those of Ephesus, but with different names. The high level, cosmic powers of evil control these contemporary god-spirit-magical systems, however.

There is one more area of insight into the work of the powers among men which needs to be considered: the strategy of supernatural evil in manipulating human institutions and social structures to work evil among humanity. Walter Wink is the champion of this more socio-cultural institutional view of spirit evil. He says that we must see Paul including here in 6:12

all the *archai* and *exousiai* . . . not only divine but human, not only personified but structural, not only demons and kings but the world atmosphere and power invested in institutions, laws, traditions and rituals as well, for it is the cumulative, totalizing effect of all these taken together that creates the sense of bondage of a "dominion of darkness" (see Col. 1:13) presided over by higher powers.

Wink holds the *kosmokratoras* to include all who hold mastery over the world, the spirit of empire, and

all forms of institutional idolatry, whereby religion, commerce, education, and state make their own well-being and survival the final criteria of morality, and by which they justify the liquidation of prophets, the persecution of deviants, and the ostracism of opponents.

Wink continues saying that it is the "suprahuman dimension of power in institutions and the cosmos which must be fought, not the mere human agent." The institution will perpetuate itself no matter who the human agent "because that is what the institution requires for its survival." Finally he says that it is "this suprahuman quality which accounts for the apparent 'heavenly,' bigger than life, quasi-eternal character of the Powers."

While favorably responding from the depths of my being to Wink's words, I must emphasize the strong personal supernatural dimension to this warfare motif as well as the social. In fact, the personal-spiritual dimension seems to be Paul's primary focus in Ephesians 6:10–20.

Finally Paul says we are at war with the *pneumatika tēs ponerias en tois epouranios*, "the spiritual (hosts) of evil in the heavenlies" (*Greek-English New Testament*). Arnold comments



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

that with this phrase Paul ends his list of powers with a “comprehensive designation for all the classes of hostile spirits—*ta pneumatika tēs ponerias*.” He says that the “term should probably be viewed as an alternative expression for *pneuma* [spirit] not *pneumata* [spiritual]. Believers need to be prepared to engage all the forces of evil in battle.”

Eadie contributes a remarkably inspiring and insightful observation. He says that to “rouse up the Christian soldiery, the apostle brings out into bold relief the terrible foes which they are summoned to encounter.” He says that as to

their position, they are no subalterns, but foes of mighty rank, the nobility and chieftains of the fallen spirit-world; as to their office, their domain is “this darkness” in which they exercise imperial sway; as to their essence, they are not encumbered with an animal frame, but are “spirits”; and as to their character, they are “evil”—their appetite for evil only exceeds their capacity for producing it.

Finally he says that their “nature is evil, their commission is evil, their work is evil. Evil and evil only are they, alike in essence and operation.”

This then is the foe and his forces we face in battle.

Offensive and Defensive Weapons

Many commentators and preachers affirm that all the weapons listed in Ephesians 6:14–17, with the possible exception of the sword of the Spirit, are defensive. Is that really true? No. A warrior who never attacks the enemy but only defends himself is a trapped warrior. An army that only defends but never attacks is unfit for war. A church which does not reach out to war but only stands and defends itself is already defeated. In spiritual warfare the best defense is to go on the offense.

Walter Wink comments on this question:

It is humorous to watch the statement bob from scholar to scholar that the weapons listed here are all “defensive.” . . . The Pentagon says the same about nuclear missiles. . . . The terms employed are taken straight from the legionnaire’s equipment and the metaphor is of the church like the Roman wedge, the most efficient and terrifying military formation known up to that time and for some thousand years after.

Wink says Paul describes armor that is both offensive and defensive. Although the shield, helmet, breastplate, and greaves (for girding the loins) were all defensive, the other pieces of armor were offensive. The “round shield of the early [Roman] legionnaires had long since been elongated (the scutum); two-thirds covered his body and one-third covered his comrade to the left. This brilliant innovation encouraged tight ranks, since each fighter was in part dependent on his neighbor for protection.” The Roman wedge was primarily for protection while the soldiers were *on the offensive*. Paul omits the legionnaire’s *pilum* (javelin) and *pugio* (dagger), but the dagger was carried in the girdle and may be implied by “girding up the loins.” The *pilum* was more for disarming than killing the enemy. “Their absence does nothing to turn the *gladius* into a ‘defensive’ weapon. It was the centerpiece of the Roman army’s devastating military efficiency.”

In referring to Paul’s three-time repetition of “stand firm,” Wink says this “has perhaps contributed to the idea that the Christian is not on the attack so much as trying to keep from being overwhelmed.” Wink quotes Chrysostom, who was familiar with legionnaire ways, to clarify the sense of this “stand firm”: “The very first feature in tactics is, to know how to stand well, and many things will depend upon that . . . Doubtless then he (Paul) does not mean merely any way of standing, but a correct way.”

Wink himself refers to “stand firm” in verses 11 and 14 as having “the sense of the ‘drawing up a military formation for combat.’ ” In verse 13 the phrase



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

refers to the triumphant stance of the victor. In the latter verse it is linked with *katergasamenoi*; Bauer translates, “after proving victorious over everything, to stand ground.” The writer has no notion here of Christian life as a last-ditch, rear-guard, defensive operation; this is war with the powers of evil. *He depicts the church taking the fight to the enemy, and he expects the church to win.* (italics mine)

Finally Wink says that “against such evil the church is well advised to stand shoulder to shoulder, shields overlapping. Hence this instruction in armaments is issued in the plural throughout the paragraph.” He continues saying that

not individuals but the whole people of God is addressed. Solitary efforts may at times be necessary, but far better when many, each individually equipped thus, can struggle (pale 6:12) together and perhaps even “prove victorious over everything . . . All this, then, figures in the Church task vis-a-vis the powers.

A Look at Each Piece of the Armor

Lincoln says that Paul’s presentation of the different parts of the armor of God “shows what it means to have accomplished everything necessary for battle, and explains how it is that one stands.”

1. *Loins girded with truth* (v. 14b). The verb in the middle voice means the Christian must gird *himself* with the truth. In Luke 12:35, 37, and 17:8, girding one’s loins is a sign of readiness for service.

Lincoln feels the source of Paul’s imagery was probably the Old Testament more than the Roman soldier. “The primary influence on the writer’s choice of terminology at this point is LXX Isaiah 11:5, where the Messiah-King is said to have righteousness girding his loins and truth clothing his sides.” He next refers to E. Levine, who he says, “claims that all such references still carry allusions to the belt-wrestling practices of the ancient Near East and that the wrestling belt became symbolic of soldiers ready for battle.”

The question is often asked at this point, what is the “truth” that Paul has in mind? The two answers most often suggested are: The truth is the word of truth, that is, the Gospel and Jesus as the truth; the truth is the absence of all deceit. Lincoln says that “since in LXX Isaiah 11:5 truth referred to faithfulness and loyalty and what was said there of the Messiah is now applied to believers, it is likely that that is also the force of ‘truth’ in this verse.” Others disagree. They say that truth here is the truth of the gospel (1:13) since Paul has consistently used truth in this manner in this book.

Which is it? In light of the power motif of Ephesians, I lean towards the latter. It is the gospel which is “the power of God unto salvation.” Arnold says that “those who live under the influence of the powerful gospel and ‘walk in the light’ will live by the truth and speak truth (4:25; 5:9) and thereby resist the devil, not giving him a place (4:27).” This is truth encounter.

2. *The breastplate of righteousness* (v. 14b). Again, we have the middle voice. The putting on of the breastplate of righteousness is the task of the individual believer. We also end up with two views of righteousness. The first is that “righteous” means a righteous life. The second is that it is the righteousness provided in the gospel. Wuest says, “It is not justifying righteousness but sanctifying righteousness.”

Lincoln, taking the same position as Wuest, again borrows a metaphor out of the Old Testament. He says that “‘the breastplate of righteousness’ was part of Yahweh’s armor in the depictions found in Isaiah 59:17 and Wisdom 15:18 (cf. also Isaiah 11:5, where righteousness is the Messiah’s girdle).” Lincoln refers to 1 Thessalonians 5:8. He says that “Paul had made the virtues of faith and love the Christian’s breastplate, but he also depicted righteousness as



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

necessary for the battle when he spoke of ‘the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left’ in 1 Corinthians 6:7.”

Arnold takes a different stance.

If the author of Ephesians reflects anything of Pauline tradition in his use of “righteousness,” the concept of divine power is clearly present. Paul writes that the reason the Gospel can be described as the power of God has to do with the fact that it reveals the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:16). The righteousness of God is therefore construed as divine power.

While I see truth in both views, I believe Arnold is right in his power motif. The righteousness of God, in this context, is a power term. The gift of the righteousness of God to the believer totally defeats the Enemy. This righteousness of God in turn transforms the believer’s life. The result of experiencing the divine righteousness is a life of righteousness.

3. *Feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace* (v. 15). Again there are two primary views here. Some say the focus is on evangelism. As we march forward—thus the motif of the soldier’s sandals—we will be opposed. In the midst of the war, ours is the only message of peace. Lincoln puts forward the second view. Paul here refers to readiness for spiritual warfare, Lincoln says. This is consistent with the main teaching of the entire Ephesians 6:10–20 passage. He observes that Paul here is primarily influenced by the language of an Old Testament passage “which mentions feet in connection with proclaiming the gospel of peace. The text in question is LXX Isaiah 52:7, ‘as the feet of one preaching glad tidings of peace’ (cf. also Nah. 1:15).”

Lincoln mentions that “Paul has used this verse in connection with the preacher of the gospel in Romans 10:15.” He believes in Ephesians the “writer links the equipping of the feet not with the proclamation of the gospel of peace but with the *etoimasia* ‘readiness,’ of the gospel of peace.” He states that “the term nowhere actually means ‘firm footing,’ and its more usual sense is readiness, preparedness, or preparation (cf., e.g., LXX ps. 9:17; Wis. 13:12; Ep. Arist. 182; Josephus, Ant. 10:1.2, 9 V.L).”

He concludes, saying that the “reference is, therefore, not to readiness to proclaim the gospel . . . but to the readiness or preparedness for combat and for standing in the battle that is bestowed by the gospel of peace (cf. also Meyer, 334–34; Abbot, 185; Hendriksen, 277).” While Lincoln may be correct, one view does not necessarily exclude the other.

4. *The shield of faith* (v. 16). Lincoln again goes to the Old Testament. He says “the shield was used as an image for God’s protection of his people (cf., e.g., Gen. 15:1; Ps. 5:2; 18:2, 30, 35; 28:7; 33:20; 35:2; 59:11; 91:4; 115:9–11; 144:1).” He then states that Paul here uses *thureos* or *scutum*, for shield. It is the “large shield, four feet in length and two and a half feet in width, which is described by Polybius 6.23.2 as the first part of the Roman panoplia and which protected the whole body.”

Lincoln then looks at the place of faith in Ephesians. “Faith takes hold of God’s resources in the midst of the onslaughts of evil and produces the firm resolve which douses anything the enemy throws at the believer (cf. also 1 Thess. 5:8, where faith is part of the breastplate, and 1 Peter 5:8, 9, where firm faith is necessary for resisting the devil).”

He next refers to Paul’s statement that “faith will enable the believer ‘to extinguish all the burning arrows of the evil one.’ Burning arrows feature in the Old Testament in Psalms 7:13 and Proverbs 26:18. They are the *malleoli*, arrows tipped with inflammable tar or pitch and shot off after being lit.” He says that “Livy (Hist. 21.8) graphically describes how these arrows, even when not hitting the body but caught by the shield, caused panic because they blazed fiercely and tempted soldiers to throw down their burning shields and become vulnerable to the spears of their enemies.”



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

He applies this to Ephesians 6:16. “Here the burning arrows represent every type of assault devised by the evil one, not just temptation to impure or unloving conduct but also false teaching, persecution, doubt, and despair. Faith is the power which enables believers to resist and triumph over such attacks.”

5. *The helmet of salvation* (v. 17). Paul introduces the next two pieces of armor with another change of verbs. The one verb “take” applies to both pieces of armor listed next, “the helmet of salvation” and “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.” S. D. F. Salmond writing in the *Expositor’s Greek New Testament* says, “The verb has its proper sense here, not merely ‘take,’ but ‘receive,’ i.e., as a gift from the Lord, a thing provided and offered by Him.”

The helmet is, of course, required for the defense of the head. Paul is certainly quoting from Isaiah 59:17.

And He [God] put on righteousness like a breastplate
And a helmet of salvation on his head.

Beautiful words indeed! The helmet of salvation protects us from the most fatal of all blows to a child of God, the doubts about his acceptance “warts and all” by God.

Lincoln says that for Paul

what ultimately protects believers is that God has already rescued them from bondage to the prince of the realm of the air and seated them with Christ in the heavenly realms (cf. 2:1–10). By appropriating this salvation as their helmet, believers have every reason to be confident of the outcome of the battle.

6. *The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God* (v. 17). We have two technical words used here by Paul. One is the word for “sword,” and the other is the word for “the Word of God.” Here for the first time in Ephesians, the Holy Spirit is seen to be the power behind the Christian warrior’s use of the Word of God which is the sword God has given him for battle.

Lincoln again has a good word for us. He says that the “sharp short sword (*maxaira* opposed to *pouphaia*, the long sword) was the crucial offensive weapon in close combat.” He then mentions that this “sword stands not for the Spirit but for ‘the word of God.’” He then wisely states that the “Spirit is not so much the one who supplies the sword—both the helmet and the sword are to be received from God—but the one who gives it its effectiveness, its cutting edge . . . (cf. Heb. 4:12).”

Lincoln next mentions 2 Thessalonians 2:8. “The Lord Jesus will slay the lawless one with the breath of his mouth,” also quoting Isaiah 11:4. Then he reminds us that in Revelation “Christ wages war with the sword of his mouth, and his word reveals people’s deeds for what they are (cf. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:13, 15).”

Lincoln says that in

Ephesians, however, when the Christian soldier wields the sword of the word, it is not first of all the word of judgment but the good news of salvation. *Rema* here, not *logos*, refers to the gospel (cf. also 5:26; Rom. 10:18; 1 Peter 1:25). This is “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (1:13), “the gospel of peace” (6:15).

Finally Lincoln states that “as the Church continues to be the reconciled and reconciling community, the gospel conquers the alienating hostile powers and brings about God’s saving purposes.”

As we close Paul’s outline of the divine armor God has provided for the Christian warrior, we discover the apostle is not finished yet (vv. 18–20). While prayer is not to be seen as an additional piece of armor, it is directly connected to all Paul has said from verses 10–17.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

Prayer is not a seventh piece of spiritual armor, however. It is too grand, too foundational, too essential, too all encompassing to be listed as just another piece of spiritual armor, important as they are.

I like Arnold's way of expressing this. He says Paul's summons to prayer "completes his presentation of the spiritual weaponry." The "author appears to give prayer a more prominent place than merely the seventh among a list of spiritual weapons. He says the "author maintains a structural continuity with the foregoing delineation of the weapons by employing a participle (*proseuxomenoi*) still in dependence on the main verb 'stand' in verse 14."

Arnold sees Paul as wanting "his readers to understand prayer as an essential spiritual weapon, but more than a weapon." He says "it is foundational for the deployment of all the other weapons." Indeed, it is the key to effective warfare with high-level, cosmic powers of evil. In Ephesians 6 it is the *total context* in which spiritual warfare is engaged and won.

J. O. Fraser and the China Inland Mission

Just how foundational prayer is to the deployment of all the other weapons is vividly illustrated in the story of J. O. Fraser of the then China Inland Mission, now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF). Fraser, a British missionary, worked among the Lisu tribal people in southwest China from 1909 until his death in 1938. My source is his biography written by Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Behind the Ranges, Fraser of Lisuland*. I quote freely from both Fraser's words and those of Mrs. Taylor with the publisher's permission.

To the Lisu, *conversion had to be deliverance from the fear of the demon spirits they worshipped*, that is, power encounter. When this did not occur, they frequently fell back into spirit homage. Fraser's early years of ministry were difficult. He soon realized that his ignorance of the spirit world was one of his major problems. This ignorance severely handicapped his converts. They suffered continual demonic attacks, many returning to their former lifestyle, pacifying the abusive spirits. The result was terrible setbacks in Fraser's ministry. He had assured his converts that Jesus is mightier than the spirits, but he did not know how to teach them the way of victory. They were defeated by the demons again and again.

In one case at least, Mrs. Taylor reports that some believers were reinvaded by the spirits. "Fraser was still slow to believe that demonization can be as real today as when our Lord was upon earth."⁵³ One of his key families went back into demonism when a family member became seriously ill. God did not heal him in spite of their prayers. A diviner told them they must return to spirit worship in order for him to be healed. They did. He died, anyway, but it was too late. They had chosen again to serve the spirits that terrified them.

Then Fraser, always a man of prayer, began to build an intercessory team in England. He could not form a team in Lisuland as he had no strong believers as yet. Mrs. Taylor says this "was to become in a very real sense the power behind his work." At that time Fraser himself went into a deep spiritual depression. He did not know at first what to make of it. Was it loneliness? Was it the poor food, the struggle with the language, or the deadlock in the work?

As time wore on, he realized there were influences of another kind to be reckoned with. All he had believed and rejoiced in became unreal. Even his prayers seemed to mock him. *Does God answer prayer?* The question tormented him. Thoughts of suicide persistently tempted him. Mrs. Taylor writes that "deeply were the foundations shaken in those days and nights of conflict." He soon "realized that behind it all were 'powers of darkness,' seeking to overwhelm him."



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

She then makes a remarkable statement. “*He dared to invade Satan’s kingdom, undisputed for ages.* At first, vengeance had fallen on the Lisu inquirers, an easy prey. Now, he was himself attacked—and it was war to the death, spiritually.

“Then help came when the rainy season was at its dreariest. Someone sent him a copy of *The Overcomer*, a magazine with which Fraser was unfamiliar. It set forth the very truth needed in that strange conflict, and the truth set him free. The truth that dawned upon Fraser as he pored over the welcome pages was that *Satan is indeed a conquered foe.* All of this he had held before, as a matter of doctrine. Now, it shone out for him in letters of light that victory is ours. Deep in the Lisu mountains, he responded to the liberating power of the Cross. ‘They overcame him [the great enemy] by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.’ There, in that poor shack, the victory was won that was to mean life to thousands.”

Fraser later told Mrs. Taylor, “I read over and over—that number of *The Overcomer*. What it showed me was that deliverance from the power of the evil one comes through definite resistance on the ground of the Cross. I had found that much of the spiritual teaching one hears does not seem to work. . . . The passive side of leaving everything to the Lord Jesus as our life, while blessedly true, was not . . . needed just then. Definite resistance on the ground of the Cross was what brought me light. For I found that *it worked.* I felt like a man perishing of thirst, to whom some beautiful, clear, cold water had begun to flow.

“People will tell you,” Fraser continued, “that such and such a truth is the secret of victory. No: we need different truth at different times. ‘Look to the Lord,’ some will say. ‘*Resist the devil,*’ is also Scripture (James 4:7). And I found *it worked!*”

“That cloud of depression dispersed. I found that I could have victory in the spiritual realm whenever I wanted it. The Lord Himself resisted the devil vocally: ‘Get thee behind me Satan!’ I, in humble dependence on Him, did the same. I talked to Satan . . . using the promises of Scripture as weapons. And they *worked.* One had to learn, gradually, how to use the new-found weapon of resistance.”

Some time later, Fraser was much tried by the persistent recurrence of evil thoughts. They became obsessive. One day Fraser went out to a hidden prayer haunt and voiced his determined resistance to Satan. He combined prayer, worship, praise, and intercession. He prayed in the context of spiritual warfare and took an Ephesians 3:10 stance against the cosmic powers of evil attacking him and blinding his beloved Lisu people.

“I claimed deliverance on the ground of my Redeemer’s victory on the Cross,” he said. “I even shouted my resistance to Satan and all these thoughts. The obsession collapsed then and there, like a pack of cards, to return no more.

“James 4:7 is still in the Bible. Our Lord cried . . . ‘with a *loud voice*’ at the grave of Lazarus. He cried ‘with a *loud voice*’ from the Cross. In times of conflict I still find deliverance through repeating . . . out loud, appropriate Scripture, brought to my mind through the Holy Spirit. It is like crashing through opposition. ‘Resist the devil and he will flee from you.’ ”

Spiritual Warfare Lessons From Fraser

Let’s look at some of the key dimensions of experience-oriented spiritual warfare based on aggressive action against Satan and high level cosmic principalities and powers rediscovered by Fraser.

1. *He had dared to “invade Satan’s territory.”* There is such a thing as invading Satan’s



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

- territory. Some of His churches, Jesus said, were located in “the synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9–11; 3:9), others where “Satan’s throne is” (2:13). Jesus spoke of one area ruled by a “Jezebel” spirit (2:20–23), and another committed to “the deep things of Satan” (2:24).
2. *Because of this “the powers of darkness were seeking to overwhelm him.”* “God will never let this happen to an obedient, Spirit-filled child of God,” we are told. “Jesus will protect him from such brutal blows.” In that case Fraser must not have been an “obedient Spirit-filled, child of God” because it happened to him. Mrs. Taylor says he became so overwhelmed by Satan, he was tempted to commit suicide “and that persistently.”
 3. *He was himself attacked. His was a war to the death, spiritually.*
 4. *His victory came when he faced the reality of what he already knew theologically, that “Satan is indeed a conquered foe.”* Christ, our risen Lord has in truth bruised Satan’s head upon the cross of shame. He made a show of principalities and powers, triumphing over them. (See my study on Satan as a defeated foe in chapter 52.)
 5. *He learned “the already, but not yet” warfare reality.* Though already defeated, Satan was not yet completely bound. He was on a long chain and that chain reached to Lisuland. Satan and his demons had to be fought through prayer, intercession, and Ephesians 3:10 resistance.
 6. *We need different truth at different times.* “Resist the devil” is also Scripture (James 4:7). Fraser found it worked! Fraser resisted the Devil vocally, using the promises of Scripture as weapons, and they worked. He learned gradually how to use the newfound weapons of resistance.
 7. *Prayer is the true key to victory* in spiritual warfare, not just vocal resistance against the devil.
 8. *Warfare against deeply entrenched high-level cosmic spirits needed an intercessory team,* and it meant a long period of intercession and resistance before victory would come.
 9. *Victory was progressive.* It could be won, but then lost again if intercession and warfare were neglected after the initial victories.

Soon after this, the people movement began. “After hours of talking it all over, the majority said they would like to become Christians,” Fraser reported of family conversions. This is how a people movement begins.

Aggressive, offensive storming of hell’s gates became a major part of his evangelistic and pastoral strategy. After years of battle in prayer and preaching-teaching, the harvest finally came. When it occurred more was done in a few short months of reaping after years of sowing in tears, than in all the time before.

It was in that context that Fraser developed his famous concept of “the prayer of faith.” He knew it would take time. The strong man in a specific area is not bound by a few prayer meetings. It requires persistence in prayer. It is accomplished with time and persistent group warfare prayer. Fraser’s letter on prayer and the prayer of faith contains excellent insight for today’s intercessors.⁶²

Mrs. Taylor wrote that

recent experience had deepened his conviction as to the vital part God had assigned in the work of His kingdom to intercessory prayer. . . . He had occasion to notice the difference between people and places that had been much prayed for and those that had not. In the former, half the work seemed to have been done already, an Unseen Ally had gone ahead to prepare the way. This made him not only



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

persevere in prayer himself, whether he felt like it or not, but impelled him to induce and encourage Christians at home to pray.

Here is a story involving most everything Paul has been teaching us about warfare with the spirit world: Territorial spirits. Warfare praying. The spirit warrior himself suffering severe demonic attacks. Battles with oppression and depression of spirit. The demonic bondage of the unconverted through occultism. Powerful, high-level, cosmic evil spirits attacking and stopping the growth of the new converts. Converts falling back to their former lifestyle. Demonization of some Christians.

We find the missionary's battles with his own unworkable theology of spiritual warfare. We find the severe sufferings involved in Christian service in places where high level territorial spirits have ruled unchallenged for centuries.

Here we discover power encounters galore, many lost, most won. The Enemy is forced to retreat, but he never gives up. His power is only measurably broken when a strong, praying, and godly *church* finally emerges in enemy's territory.

Above all, here we discover the place of prayer and intercession in kingdom ministries. It is not quick, instant prayer, but continuous, prevailing intercession. It is not one man, a spiritual lone ranger, praying alone, but groups of intercessors, thousands of miles away, who join him in persistent, systematic prayer.

The prayer of faith is his burden. When he breaks through to the rest of faith, he does not cease from battle, however. He continues to battle, but now with confidence of victory. This is Ephesians 6 in action, the Christian warrior arrayed in all his spiritual armor.²¹

²¹ Murphy, E. F. (1996). [*Handbook for spiritual warfare*](#) (pp. 402–415). Thomas Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

ALREADY PROVIDED NOTES

BST EPHESIANS – STOTT

IVP

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,**



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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**.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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’.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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?**

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)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 ‘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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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, 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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.

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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.'

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?



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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'.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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?]

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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.*



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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’ 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?



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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 freely 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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' 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 (*ektrophō*) 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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-



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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?

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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-



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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.

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.*



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

In other words, our struggle is not with human beings but with cosmic intelligences; our enemies 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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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, 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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’.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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' (*dikaïosynē*) 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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.

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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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,



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 '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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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” (*aluisis*) 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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'.²²

²² Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 195–291). InterVarsity Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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.

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 364.²³

²³ Thomas Nelson Publishers. (2001). In [*What does the Bible say about... The ultimate A to Z resource fully illustrated*](#) (pp. 211–212). Thomas Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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).

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)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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; 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.



Structure of 6:10–20

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)

²⁴ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [*The Woman’s Study Bible*](#) (Eph 5:18–6:11). Thomas Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

6:17a Salvation/Liberation

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 provides the necessary protection for the struggles of life. This armor is not what God is wearing



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 heavenlies. *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). 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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 *katargazomai* 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 *katargazomai* 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).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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*.

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 *hereb*, the term for "sword" used in such important divine warfare texts as 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,"



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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;
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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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). 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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; 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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

Isa. 59:17

*Wisd. of Sol. 5:17–1
20a*

Eph. 6:14–17

panoply or whole
armor

panoply or whole
armor

girdle of truth

breastplate of righteousness/justice
of breastplate of righteousness/justice and love
of breastplate of faith
of righteousness/justice

shoes of the runner of
peace

shield of faith or
faithfulness

helmet of salvation
helmet of justice
of impartial salvation
of the hope of salvation
of helmet of salvation

sword of stern wrath

sword of the Spirit, the
word of God



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

clothed with the
garments of
vengeance and wrath

(next, in 59:19, natural(next, in 5:20b–23,
phenomena: wind,creation as ally in
river) warfare: lightning,
hail, sea, rivers, wind)

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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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., Gnilya: 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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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 in the Bible stresses quite strongly that *God* is the one who sees to it that justice is assured and evil defeated



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

(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.

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.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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

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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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 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,



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 16: Clothed With The Supernatural - Ephesians 6

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., Gnika: 325)? Is our *love* for Christ to be “unending” (so NIV, NRSV, NASB, REB; Best, 1998:620)? Does *Christ* live “eternally in the heavens” (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!²⁵

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**

²⁵ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 226–321). Herald Press.