Ephesians

Lesson 11

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|  |  | | **Jesus Christ**  Head over creation  Eph. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:24-28 |  |  | | |
|  |  | All humans have a fundamental equality based on being created by God in the image of God, Gen. 1:27 | | | |  |  |
| Wives | Submit to husband like church submits to Christ, Eph. 5:22-24, Col. 3:18 | |  | Husbands | Love wife sacrificially like Christs sacrifices and cares for church, Eph. 5:25-33, Col. 3:19 | | |
| Children | Obey parent in the Lord, Eph. 6:1-2, Col. 3:20 | |  | Fathers | Disciple children in the Lord; Eph. 6:4, Col 3:21 | | |
| Slaves | Obey master as though serving Christ, Eph. 6:5-8, Col. 3:22-24 | |  | Masters | Be fair to slaves because God judges masters, Eph. 6:9, Col. 4:1 | | |
| Citizens | Believers should submit to secular governing authorities as though ordained by God (Rom. 13:1-2 | |  | Governors | Govern justly recognizing that you are God’s servant for that purpose (Rom. 13:4) | | |

The Wall Street Journal had an article about a “best-selling” marriage therapist named Esther Perel called *She’s a Marriage Counselor, but for Your Work Relationships.* Nikki Wallker, Nov. 15, 2019. The article includes an interesting secular perspective on marriage:

In Ms. Perel’s view, a pair of revolutions has transformed relationships at home and work. Marriage, once an economic arrangement, is now seen as a path to self-actualization, a way for each partner to become their best self. (“We used to leave marriages because of misery,” says Ms. Perel. “Now we leave because we could be happier elsewhere.”)

If two imperfect human beings each believe the purpose of a marriage is to make them as happy as possible, it is hard to see how the relationship can survive in this fallen world. Paul’s argument is just the opposite. Each person should view marriage as an opportunity to do something eternally significant by loving and ministering to another person, i.e., being one means of grace that God can use to help the other person “become their best self” according to God’s standard.

Humans have an essential equality as creatures made in God’s image, and believers have an additional equality of status as covenant heirs in Christ, but there are still social roles that involve either submission (which is a form of sacrifice) or sacrifice (which is a form of submission). The trinity provides a model involving equality of nature and distinct roles including submission.

The fall makes all human relationships involving leadership/submission problematic, even though God has ordained the foundational human institutions of families and government (Rom. 13:1; Gen. 9:5-6.)

--leaders are self-centered, ignore God’s will, make poor decisions even when well-intentioned, and often fail to sacrificially love the people in their care;

--followers have their issues as well; they can also be self-centered, ignore God’s will, and challenge even good leadership decisions;

--God knows all that and still asks believers to fulfill social roles in this lifetime with an attitude of sacrificial love as part of following Christ; believers should strive to be great at any social role they have, including citizens, secular leaders, employees, employers, husbands, wives, mothers, and children; Christ promises to reward his followers for the good they do in this difficult social environment (Eph. 6:7-8; Col. 3:23-24.) For believers in any of these leadership roles, this means viewing leadership as a responsibility and service obligation, rather than a privilege or an opportunity to further one’s own interest.

--the instances where believers should obey God rather than human authorities exist but are exceptions (Acts 4:19-20).

Authority derives from trust, not power or position.

--in what sense is this statement inaccurate?

--in what sense is it true?

--how does it impact our behavior in various social roles?

At what point does a believer’s association with a sinful practice constitute participation or approval of that sin?

--Romans 14:1-23; 1 Cor. 8:1-13 and 10:14-11:1; Acts 15:29; 21:25; Gal. 5:20; 1 John 5:21

--The NT prohibits the practice of worshipping idols (Gal. 5:20; 1 John 5:21)

--Paul asserts that attending a feast including sacrifices to idols and then eating food from those sacrifices constitutes participation in idolatry and with evil spirits, even if the believer realizes idols do not represent actual living spirits. (1 Cor. 10:14-23.) In those circumstances, Paul says the believer is participating in the idolatry.

--On the other hand, meat left over from such feasts was sold in markets. Paul asserts that believers can freely purchase meat in such a market without asking where the meat came from. (1 Cor. 14:25-26.) Similarly, Paul asserts that a believer could eat a meal in an unbeliever’s house without asking where the meat had come from. (1 Cor. 14:27.)

--In fact, Paul asserts, that in a setting where no one who cares about this issue will be negatively impacted, a believer can purchase food in a market that he knows was left over from one of these feasts, and he can eat that meat without participating in idolatry. (1 Cor. 10:4-13.) The difference appears to be that the believer did not attend or participate in a ceremony honoring an idol.

--On the other hand, Paul asserts that believers who subjectively feel that purchasing and/or eating such meat would constitute participation in idolatry, should avoid purchasing or eating that meat because doing something that you subjectively believe to be sinning is a sinful practice. (Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 8:7.) If it were otherwise, then most idolatry would not sinful, since idols do not represent anything real.

--As a result, an NT church might include some people, like Paul, who believed that he could purchase and eat meat in markets that had been used in a pagan idolatrous feasts without approving or participating in idolatry. (1 Cor. 8:4-8; 1 Cor. 10:29-30.) However, it might include other believers who were so concerned about avoiding idolatry that they became vegetarians. (Rom. 14:2; 1 Cor. 8:7-8.)

--Paul urged both camps not to insist that the other camp change their position. (Rom. 14:1-4.) Even more specifically, he urged the meat-lovers to avoid eating meat in situations where it could tempt a vegetarian believer to do something the vegetarian felt was wrong. (Rom. 14:14-15; 1 Cor. 8:9-13 and 10:28-29.) But, conversely, he urged the vegetarian camp to accept the meat-lovers and not condemn them for engaging in a practice that had, at most, an indirect connection to idolatry. (Rom. 14:3-4.)

--Paul generally urged believers not to be judgmental about each other concerning gray areas. (Rom. 14:4; 15:7.) On the other hand, Paul urged churches to expel those who engaged in clearly sinful practices. (1 Cor. 5:1-13.)

--One thing that can prevent a judgmental or legalistic attitude about a gray area is taking the time to fully understand not only what another Christian believes but why they believe it. More specifically, why they believe their position is consistent with their faith. This requires some very unAmerican habits: being willing to listen patiently, being slow to take offense, and accepting another person’s description of his/her own motive at face value.

**Eph. 6:10-21 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand.**

At 6:10, Paul stops using the verb “walk” or “live” to mark a new section, and says, “In conclusion” or “finally,” “be strengthened in the Lord, that is, in the might of his strength.” This is an exhortation for the Ephesians to grow in spiritual strength that originates from Christ. Paul provides an extended word picture explaining how Christ’s spiritual strength can be transferred to the Ephesians. He exhorts them to put on the “full” or “complete” armor “of God,” meaning armor provided by or originating from God.

The reason or need for being strengthened by Christ and putting on the complete armor of God is so the Ephesians will be able to “stand” against the devil’s schemes. “Stand” means to hold one’s position. It is often used in a military context, and so fits with the theme of armor. Paul further explains that believers’ “struggle” is not against “blood and flesh.” “Struggle” could be literally translated “wrestle.” Along with the preposition used, it implies hand-to-hand or close range combat. But the combat is not physical; the enemies are not humans. The enemy is the devil and the “rulers,” “authorities,” and “cosmic powers of darkness.” These entities are further described as “spirits of wickedness in the heavenlies.” In Jewish thought, the devil and fallen angels have access to heavenly realms and earth in this age. (Job 1:6-12; Dan. 10:13, 20.) Paul and other NT writers similarly portray the devil as an active enemy in this age capable of affecting people on earth. (2 Thess. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 5:8.) So Paul is not saying the conflict is limited to the realm of heaven. He is emphasizing that the struggle he is talking about is with evil spiritual beings rather than humans who do evil things, including persecuting believers. Unbelieving humans should, from a spiritual perspective, be regarded as captives and potential converts, rather than enemies. The description of these powerful spiritual enemies should have made the Ephesians understand their urgent need for Christ’s spiritual strength/armor.

Having laid out the need, Paul repeats the exhortation to “take up” the “full armor of God” so that they will “be able” to “withstand” or “resist” in “the day of evil,” and, “having done everything, to stand.” There are various explanations for “day of evil,” ranging from (1) this entire age; (2) specific attacks that occur in this age; to (3) just the final, cataclysmic struggle just before/when Christ returns. Paul’s tone in this passage indicates putting on the armor is urgent and the struggle is happening now, which seems inconsistent with the third view. On the other hand, the phrase “the day” seems inconsistent with the first view. It seems most likely that Paul is warning the Ephesians that they will encounter episodes of heightened spiritual pressure, and they will need Christ’s strength to withstand those times. In context, “having done everything” means “having put on the full armor of God.” The implication is that if believers obey the command to acquire Christ’s strength by putting on the full armor of God, they will be able to stand, even when attacked by evil spiritual forces.

Verses 6:10-13 describe the various items that make up the full armor of God. Paul begins it by repeating the exhortation to stand. Then he exhorts the Ephesians to gird their waists or mid-section with truth. Scholars think he is referring to a leather utility belt that could hold a sword or dagger and had leather straps, sometimes studded with metal, that hung down and provided some protection for the waist and thighs. How would “truth” protect against the devil’s schemes? Spiritual temptations generally involve some false premise (you won’t really die if you eat that fruit . . .). A clear understanding of reality helps us guard our hearts against deceitful ideas. Eph. 4:14-15.

“put on the breastplate of righteousness.” A basic Roman soldier typically wore a brass plate over his chest, which protected the heart and lungs. How does “putting on righteousness” protect against spiritual attacks or temptations? A commitment to righteousness simply because it is the right thing to do/what God helps ward off spiritual attacks based on ideas like: everyone’s getting away with it, why shouldn’t you? If you don’t get caught, it doesn’t matter/what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. Joseph resisting Potiphar’s wife might be a good example.

“shod the feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” Roman soldiers wore leather sandals that had metal hobnobs in the soles for traction, like cleats. The “gospel of peace” likely refers to the gospel message that Jesus provides peace between humans and God, and different groups of humans. Eph. 2:14-22. Having a firm grasp of this gospel makes you ready or prepared to stand firm against spiritual attacks based on guilt, or the lie that God doesn’t care about you/has abandoned you.

“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith with which you are able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” This type of shield, a “thureos” in Greek, “scuta” is Latin, was a large, rectangular shield that could cover the entire body. It is different than the smaller more maneuverable round shields (in Latin, “clypeus”) you may have seen in movies. The Romans used both types. The scuta included planks, canvas, calfskin, and some metal. It would be suitable for ducking behind while the opposing army launched its projectile attack before charging. The word for “arrow” could refer to any projectile weapon, including javelins and spears as well as arrows. Supposedly javelins or arrows could be smeared with pitch, then wrapped with tow (a flax wadding), lit on fire, and then shot toward an enemy. Paul says that faith can extinguish the devil’s flaming weapons, rendering them harmless. Faith, i.e, confidence in God’s protection, provision, and judgment, helps us resist many types of temptation. Sin often follows the mistaken thought that we know better than God what is in our best interest.

“take the helmet of salvation” The first-century Roman helmet was typically a combination of leather or cloth, iron, and bronze. In Paul’s time, it covered the back of the neck, and had hinged cheek-pieces. Remembering our position in Christ and the present and future blessings that accompany that position can help us resist Satan’s lies and temptations.

“and [take] the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God” First-century Roman soldiers often used a relatively short, straight sword. It was double-bladed and designed for close combat. In this context, Paul probably means the weapon provided by, or originating from, the Holy Spirit. The next phrase clarifies the nature of the weapon: “the word of God.” “word” is not “logos” in this instance, but “rema.” It the same word Jesus used in Matt. 4:4 during his confrontation with Satan when quoting scripture. This suggests Paul is saying that scripture can be used to fend off Satan’s attacks. As Jesus showed, a strong grasp of scripture can help identify the falsehoods in Satanic ideas.

‘Through every prayer and petition, praying at every opportunity, and to this end keeping alert with all persistence and petition for all the saints” This clause describes the manner or attitude that should accompany taking the helmet and sword. The participles are “praying” and “keeping alert.” The first clause strongly emphasizes appealing to, or crying out to, God for help through the power of the Spirit on all occasions by repeating various words for prayer. In context, this means whenever a spiritual attack occurs. This indicates that putting on the armor of God does not turn the believer into an independent wrecking crew. The believer should always seek God’s help/strength to respond to any spiritual attack. The second clause emphasizes persistently maintaining an alert attitude. Being alert is associated practicing prayer, implying that regular prayer helps believers not be surprised by spiritual attacks. Jesus’ preparation for his arrest by going to Gethsemane to pray, while the disciples could not stay awake, seems like a good example of using prayer to stay spiritually alert and ready for an attack. The last phrase urges each believer to pray for all other believers, indicating believers are supposed to help each other withstand spiritual attacks.

Taking to time to discuss putting on various types of equipment that each served a specific purpose indicates that believers need to use every spiritual asset to withstand spiritual attack. The emphasis on believers “putting on” and “taking up” the armor so that they can “stand” emphasizes the effort believers should put into spiritual preparation even though the armor is provided by God. Although believers can take comfort and trust in, for example God the Father’s election and the Holy Spirit’s sealing, Paul exhorts believers to put their whole effort into spiritual growth. Last, the command to stand is different than a command to attack. During this age, it is not believers’ task to attack Satan. It is enough for believers to hold their ground and not retreat, lose heart, or give up in the face of spiritual attacks. Although this passage emphasizes the believer’s responsibility to use all their effort to stand, elsewhere Paul assures us that Christ enables his followers to stand. Rom. 10:4.

In keeping with the theme of praying for all believers, Paul requests that the Ephesians pray “especially for me, that utterance might be given to me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am ambassador in chains, that I might speak boldly about it as I ought to speak.” Paul’s prayer request is for “utterances” or “words” to be given him by God when it is time for him to speak. Paul was probably thinking of his appeal before Caesar, which he was awaiting when Acts ends. Paul wanted to be able to boldly respond to the Jewish accusers who were saying that Paul (1) stirred up riots throughout the Roman empire; and (2) desecrated the kingdom. (Acts 24:5-8.) Paul hoped, without compromising the gospel, to convince the Roman authorities that Christians were not violating Jewish law, the temple, or Roman authority. (Acts 25:8.) Paul recognized, however, that he would be under immense pressure to renounce his faith, and so he wanted the Ephesians and Colossians (Col. 4:3-4) to pray that he would have the courage to explain the “mystery” that Jesus died to save all types of people. “Ambassador in chains” is a striking phrase, because ambassadors usually enjoyed diplomatic immunity. Paul’s request is an admission that he was vulnerable to worldly pressures and, even as an apostle, he needed God’s strength to fulfill his calling. Paul’s candor and honesty impresses me.

Tychicus was likely assigned the task of carrying the Ephesian, Colossian, and Philemon epistles to those communities, and verbally providing then with additional news. (Col. 4:7.) He later carried Titus and 2 Timothy, making him responsible for the delivery of 5 books of the Bible. Tychicus is first mentioned at Acts 20:4 as one of the company that left Ephesus with Paul headed toward Macedonia. Along with Timothy and Titus, Tychicus was a very important “second generation” church leader. It is no surprise that Paul calls him a “dear brother” and “faithful servant.”

Paul’s closing salutation is “Peace to the brothers and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace is often mentioned in the closing of epistles. It is a reminder that the Ephesians have peace with God the Father through Christ and a request that they would experience more of that peace. Paul combines love with faith. One can find various virtue combinations in the New Testament, but love and faith are often associated, along with one or more other virtues. (Eph. 1:15, 3:17; 1 Cor. 13:13.) As we have discussed, faith is both a gift from God and a human response to God. (Eph. 2:8.) The final benediction is for “grace” to be with all who “undyingly” or “persistently” love the Lord Jesus Christ. The term “undying” emphasizes the importance of persevering in one’s faith. The final thoughts of the epistle are similar to its beginnings. (Eph. 1:1-3.)