

Ephesians 6
FBC, 6th July 2008
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Intro

Well, after about 2½ years, this is my final talk on Ephesians. And to make it my last one, we're going to look at the whole chapter together. I guess there are two distinct sections really, although they're sort of linked.

Chapter 6 follows on from what I said a couple of weeks ago on submission in marriage. If you remember, we saw that submitting to each other is part of what it means to live out the gospel. And marriage is the first example of that Paul gives. We saw, amazingly, that marriage is a picture of the way Christ loves the church. Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church does to Christ, and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves his church. In fact, when two people are married, they become one person, just as the church becomes one with Christ. All of that should give us an incredibly high view of marriage, and it should inform the way we think about the roles of husbands and wives within a marriage. If we flatten it out and take away the God-ordained differences within marriage, then we misrepresent the gospel.

Paul follows these two examples of submission – two more domestic situations the Ephesians would have been familiar with. He covers children and parents and slaves and masters. And, just as he did with marriage, Paul wants to help the Ephesians to live out the gospel within these relationships.

Children and Parents (v1-4)

Paul's directions are pretty clear (again). *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* It's right for children to obey their parents. And he links the reason back to the Ten Commandments – specifically the 5th one. Honour your father and mother. As Paul points out, it's the first commandment in the list with a promise. Exodus 20v12 actually says, “*Honour your Father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*” If you keep *this* commandment, *this* will happen – you'll live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you (and, of course, it carries the implication that if you don't, you won't). Their status in the land God will give them depends on it.

This shows us how important it is that children honour their parents. Firstly, God included it in the ten commandments. Basically the ten most important directives for the life of God's people, and he decides to include “Honour your parents.” I think as you look around, and whenever you turn on the TV, you can see the results of children not honouring their parents. But this is about more than just having a quiet life or rearing lovely children who turn into nice adults. God's people have a *particular* reason to honour their parents. This is fundamental to how they live in the land! This is foundational for their whole society. Just like marriage, God designed parenthood. He designed family. And he designed it to work in a certain way, with each generation honouring the one before.

Paul picks that idea up, and applies it to the Ephesian Christians. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* As I said, this is about more than just being good little boys and girls. This is service to the Lord. This is part of what it means to live out the gospel – children, obey (or, submit to) your parents.

But this definitely doesn't give parents the right to rule their children with an iron fist. Fathers are to serve their children too. Paul doesn't want fathers to take advantage of their children's submission. *Do not exasperate your children* he says. Don't be unjustly harsh and tyrannical with your children. What Paul wants them to do is to serve their children – remember he's had mutual

submission in mind all along, and that doesn't change just because we're talking about parents and children. The responsibility of a Father is to *bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*. Fathers are responsible for making disciples of their children. For Paul, this is the alternative to exasperating his children. When you think about it, these two things are completely incompatible. How can you bring someone up teaching them the gospel, if the way you treat them makes a mockery of it? Instead of requiring honour for the sake of their own egos, parents are to act in a way which is *worthy* of respect, fulfilling their responsibilities, with the primary one being to teach their kids the gospel, and showing them how to live it.

So, some of you are parents. All of you are children. This is another way for us to live in a way which demonstrates the gospel. Living lives which follow God's pattern for his people. And in doing that, living lives of submission to one another which demonstrate the gospel.

Slaves and Masters (v5-9)

Last time I thought the stuff on marriage was probably quite contentious, but I think this is probably even more so. In v5-9, Paul applies this principle of submission to slavery. And it immediately makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it? Is Paul condoning slavery? How can he? Shouldn't he be proclaiming freedom to the captives?

I was chatting to Rudi about this the other day – I don't really have time to explain all of the questions we were discussing. But there are a few important things to say here. First of all, Paul **isn't** saying that slavery is good. In fact, he doesn't say anything either way. What he's doing is taking another common domestic situation and applying the submission principle to it. There are some estimate that over a quarter of the Roman Empire were slaves at one point. This was a common situation. He didn't say anything about actually getting married or having children either – he concentrates on how to live if you're already in these situations.

If you take a broader look, Paul sees slavery as contrary to the gospel - *anti-gospel*. In 1 Timothy 1v10 he includes "slave-traders" in a list of people who act contrary to the gospel. And Paul is clearly opposed to the common idea that slaves were less than human. At the cross, all those kinds of divisions are cleared away. In Galatians 3v28, he says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Christians are all guilty, and all adopted by God through the cross. And in *Philemon* Paul returns Onesimus (who's a slave) to Philemon. But he tells Philemon to accept him back as a dear brother, and to welcome him as he would welcome Paul himself.

Maybe Paul saw that it wasn't as simple as just saying 'get rid of slaves.' But you can't call him, or the Bible, pro-slavery. He's pro-gospel-living. And here he explains what living out the gospel means in the maybe-not-ideal situation of slaves and masters.

Slaves are to obey their masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as they would obey Christ (v5). Again, simple but pretty blunt. Serve these people who own you as though you were serving Jesus himself. And not only that, but serve the same when their backs are turned as when they're watching. You aren't to work hard so they'll be nice to you. You're to work hard to bring glory to Christ, and that doesn't change, whether your master is there or not.

God's perspective is different to man's. Look at verse 8. God doesn't care if you're a slave or if you're free, he cares about the good you do. As I said a minute ago – that kind of division evaporates at the foot of the cross, and what matters is the attitude of your heart.

Now I don't want to take away from the fact that Paul is talking to slaves. We can leap to quickly to

applying it to work in general, without realising that Paul is not talking about a situation you might get into willingly, like applying for a job. These slaves don't have a choice. But instead of loathing and resenting every minute of their service, Paul is telling them to bring glory to Christ by working properly.

Having said that, it *is* legitimate to apply it to our working lives. How often do we work because we have to, or because we want to get paid? And we can have the attitude that most of the world has, where we hate every minute of it, and tell whoever will listen. **Or** we can have a gospel attitude, and apply ourselves as if Christ himself were standing in front of us dishing out the orders. And not just when our bosses are watching, but when people aren't looking. It's very easy, isn't it, to make a good show of applying ourselves, but to be lazy when no-one's watching. To cut corners, knock off a bit early. But actually, we should be working as though we're serving Christ, wholeheartedly.

But masters should have the same respect for those they are in charge of. You aren't the one in charge, Paul says, God is. He's the master of all both of you, and he sees you as both the same – no favouritism. He won't let you off because you're the boss! So, just as with fathers, don't expect obedience because you're the boss. Respect those who work for you, don't lord it over them, because God sees you as both the same.

Prepare for Battle (v10-20)

Finally, we get to this famous section on the battle we're involved in as Christians. I think it follows on from what Paul's been saying about submission. The last thing Paul has to say to the Ephesians (apart from a few closing greetings) is that they need to be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. Why? Because we're in a battle. As we aim to live out the reality of the gospel, we need to know the reality of the world we're living in – and things aren't necessarily as they seem. This is no ordinary enemy we're up against, which means this is no ordinary battle. So ordinary armour won't do.

Paul says we have “the full armour of God,” and we need it so we can take our stand “against the devil's schemes” (v11). *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* As Christians, we're involved in this cosmic struggle which is going on between God and the forces of darkness which are opposed to him. These aren't flesh and blood foes – they're rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces arrayed against the Creator of the Universe. We've already had hints of this earlier in Ephesians; in chapter one, Paul describes the power which raised Christ from the dead and seated him above all of these rulers and authorities. So when we get to this point, actually we know that the enemy is defeated. Christ is above them all. But, while we wait for everything to be fully sorted out, we're engaged in battle with this enemy.

And this armour will help us to stand our ground and, when we've done everything, to stand (v13). I think that's a verse which carries with it the idea that this battle will be completed, and we'll emerge from the other side. While it's going on, we'll be equipped to stand our ground. And when it's finished, we'll still be standing. We won't be defeated.

Part of me would have liked more time to look at the armour with you, but I actually think it's been helpful to have to limit it. Whenever I've heard a sermon or read a commentary on this passage, it's been divided up, piece by piece, and then each metaphor has been explained – why the belt of truth? Why the helmet of salvation? That's not wrong, necessarily, but I think we can miss the wood because there are too many trees. There are three main things I want you to see about this “full armour of God” we're told to wear:

1. It's "**full**"
2. It's "**armour**"
3. It's "**of God**"

In verses 11 and 13, Paul calls it the "full armour of God." When we chop it up and look at each piece under a microscope, I think we can miss the idea that we're fully equipped with the full array of armour and weaponry we need. The reason Paul lists it is not to suggest some things to work on, or to give a list to choose from. Wear the whole lot. Think about it – if a Roman soldier was to go to battle wearing just his helmet and a belt, he'd be pretty vulnerable. He needs his breastplate, his sword, everything. We need to be praying that we'd wear all of these things.

Secondly, it's **armour**. That sounds really obvious doesn't it? This might sound a bit Sunday school, but what is armour? It's clothing which is hard and protective. It's impenetrable. And that's what these things are. Paul doesn't just pick these out of the air because they fit his clever picture of a soldier. When we become Christians, we put our trust in one who is trustworthy and unchanging, a sure and solid foundation. These things are all sure and solid aspects of our identity as Christians. The truth we believe, the righteousness we receive, the gospel of peace we trust in, our faith, our salvation, the word of God wielded by the Spirit of God – all unshakeable features of our lives as Christians. In this battle, when we undergo attack, and even more so when our feelings might be all over the place or we're feeling vulnerable, we need to wrap ourselves in solid gospel truth. What's the alternative? *The woolly jumper of some nice feelings I had at a conference a few years ago, or the frilly blouse of a nice bunch of friends I've got at church. Even the baseball cap of a theology degree?!* Those things won't do anything against a barrage of flaming arrows!!

And, thirdly, these things are all "**of God**." The reason this armour is so good is because it doesn't come from us, but from God. Our armour is strong because He is strong. Our armour won't be defeated because Christ is undefeated! And this isn't something we have to find from somewhere. We don't get given bits of armour as we go along like a geeky computer game. These things become ours as soon as we put our trust in God, because the hope and power of Christ crucified becomes ours. We might need to work at remembering we have it, but we do!

So, as Paul says, we're in a battle, and we need the right armour, but the great news is we've got it. If you're a Christian, you've got it. So put on the full armour of God in the face of these enemies! I think it's easy for us to downplay this idea of being in a spiritual battle. (I think it's possible to overdo it too, but I don't think that's the warning we need...). We live in a worldly world – we focus on the things we can see and touch. But there's a whole world that we can't see, and which we're fighting against. And we need to realise it, or we'll be sitting ducks. I think this is a massive problem in the way we live as Christians in the world. It affects everything. The way we approach teaching, evangelism, counselling, decision making – we can't have our eyes closed to a whole part of reality, and expect things to make sense!

OK, some people over-exaggerate the importance of these rulers and powers and authorities. But the way to guard against it isn't to down-play it or to try not to think about it. The answer is to remember that we're victorious already, we're just waiting for the all-clear to sound. While we wait, we have impenetrable armour to wear in the battle. It's sensible to be aware, but it's wrong for us to be afraid.

There's one final element of this we forget about – prayer. Paul includes it as part of the armour. "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (v18). Pray, Paul tells them. This is our special weapon in this cosmic battle. Pray for yourselves and pray for each other, he tells them. And pray

for me, Paul says.

Interestingly, he doesn't ask them to pray he'd be set free. He asks that he'd preach the gospel whenever he opens his mouth, and that he'd do it fearlessly. That's Paul's prayer request for himself, and I think he intends it to be a challenge to their priorities, and to ours. Through everything he's said to the Ephesians, the gospel has been his main concern. And that's where he ends his letter. He tells them that he's sending Tychicus to them to let them know how Paul is and to encourage them. And he finishes by wishing them peace and love and faith, and finally grace.

Grace has been a huge theme through the whole of Ephesians. And that basically sums up the book. Paul wants them to know God's grace more and more. He wants them to understand it, and to live it. He wants them to live it in the way they relate and submit to each other. And he wants them to live it in the heat of cosmic battle, but a battle which has ultimately been won by grace.

So, to finish (this talk, and Ephesians), with absolutely no apology, is a quote from Charles Spurgeon which I think sums up the book pretty well:

“Pause here, my hearer, awhile, and think before this world was made, ere God had settled the deep foundations of the mountains, or poured the seas from the laver of the bottom of his hand, he had chosen his people, and set his heart on them. To them he had given himself, his Son, his heaven, his all. For them did Christ determine to resign his bliss, his home, his life; for them did the Spirit promise all his attributes, that they might be blessed. O grace divine, how glorious thou art, without beginning, without end. How shall I praise thee? Take up the strain ye angels; sing these noble themes, the love of the Father, the love of the Son, the love of the Spirit. “