

Ephesians 6

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Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Eph 6:2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),

Eph 6:3 that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.

Eph 6:4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

In this chapter we continue where Paul discusses three interactions, the first of which we discussed in our work on Ephesians 5:

1. The wife with the husband and the husband with the wife.
2. The children to the parents and the parents to the children.
3. The slaves to the masters and the masters to the slaves.

As I said in the discussions of chapter 5, I highly recommend the book on the Christian family and its relationship to our relationships to God written by Larry Christenson.

I. Children to Parents

It is helpful in understanding the full significance of this passage by understanding Roman law at this time regarding children. “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 law was in his own hands, and could punish as he liked; he could even inflict the death penalty on his child. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child’s whole life, as long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age” (“patria potestas – the father’s power). Child repudiation was also allowed. When a baby was born it was placed before the father and if the father stooped and lifted up the baby, the child was allowed to live. If the father ignored the baby then the baby was discarded and left to either die or be picked up by someone else, usually a slave dealer.

In the background of this prevailing Roman law at the time, the Christian perspective was totally liberating of the children as they were lifted to a respected place in the Christian family. Certainly the children were to obey the father and mother, as this is the fifth commandment:

Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.”

As Paul says, this is also the first commandment that contains a promise. The promise is a prolongment (more blessed) of life in the land that God gave them.

A. Obedience

The first command that Paul gives is to obey one's parents. Obedience is at the heart of Christianity as we are to obey God. Below are some Scripture verses illustrating the importance of this obedience.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."

John 15:10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

1John 5:2 "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments."

1John 5:3 "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

2John 1:6 "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

Whomever we obey, it is him that we love. If we obey Satan, then we love him. If we obey Jesus, it is Him that we love. We cannot say that we love Jesus and obey Satan. Disobedience is at the heart of all crime and sin. ("Crime" I mean as in breaking a man-made law, and "sin" I mean as in breaking a command of God. I would say that the Bible teaches that all crime is a sin, but not all sin is a crime. Homosexuality is a sin, but in this country it is not a crime.) Teaching obedience to our children can be done by example as well as by command. Our children learn much by watching what we do and when we consistently reflect our love of God in our actions, children understand the importance of that obedience. If we do not consistently obey God in our actions, then the children are quick to pick up on the fact that obeying God is not one of our high priorities and they often will be quick to mock that behavior in their lives.

In any teaching of obedience of people to people, we must always remember the following:

Acts 5:27 "And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them,

Acts 5:28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men.""

If a father tells his son or daughter to do something that is in disobedience to God, then the child must disobey his/her father. Of course, similarly regarding a wife's relationship to her husband. The point here is that even though the father in the family is a picture of

God in relationship to the church, the father is an imperfect example, and the family's primary allegiance is to God.

Stott makes an important observation regarding the placing of this fifth commandment. The Christian community tends to place the fifth commandment in a second category with our God-required interactions with the community. However the Jews place this fifth commandment in the first category of our interactions with God, for teaching our children to obey the parents of the family is really teaching the child to obey God for the parents are under the authority of God. I agree with this placement and also prefer it for the symmetry! Paul is telling us that we are to teach the children to obey their parents because this obedience travels up the authority line to The Father.

B. Honor

The second command that Paul gives is the fifth commandment regarding showing honor to the father and mother in the family. So how does "honor" differ from "obey"? We probably don't need a dictionary definition of "obey", but let us do look up "honor".

Honor: "esteem, respect, reference, glory, and fame". Synonyms are: homage, reverence, veneration, and deference. Homage is an expression of high regard. Reverence is a feeling of deep respect and devotion. Veneration is both the feeling and worshipful expression of respect, love, and awe, especially for one whose wisdom, dignity, sacredness, and/or age merits such attention. Deference is respect or courteous regard for one that takes the form of yielding to his judgment or wishes.

So we can show honor to someone by obeying him. But we can obey someone without showing honor to him, for we can grudgingly obey someone. To obey in honor is our charge from God for that is also to be our attitude toward Him. We then honor God when we honor our parents. I am becoming more sensitive about age, for some reason. It should be that as people age they become more wise and more worthy of honor. The movies that depict older people as fools in the world are particularly loathsome to me. There is absolutely nothing funny about an older person being depicted as acting the fool in the world.

Adding honor to obedience greatly enhances the command. So obey your parents with honor as to the Lord is the commandment here.

II. Fathers to Children

The other area of family interaction that Paul discusses is the role of the father toward the children. It is very important that Paul specifically uses the father in this role of discipline in the family for The Father also disciplines His children as noted below.

Heb 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Heb 12:5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprovved by Him;

Heb 12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. "

Heb 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Heb 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Heb 12:9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

Heb 12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

Heb 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Experientially I know these verses in the earthly family situation. A child wants proper discipline, for such shows the child that the parent truly does love the child. Children will sometimes "push the edge" to see where they will be punished and if they will receive punishment. Improper discipline will certainly push the receiver of such discipline to anger. A drunken father who just beats a child for no reason certainly does not command respect and will in fact raise just anger in the child. A father's discipline that is meted out after careful analysis of the situation and an interaction with the child that includes a discussion of the reasons for the discipline is certainly the proper way for a father to discipline his child.

It is important to note that The Father never punishes His children for sins because all sins have been paid fully by the actions of Jesus Christ. However The Father does discipline His children for disobedience. The distinction between punishment and discipline of God towards His children is very important and was just recently discussed with me by my wife from her Bible study. Sin in the life of God's children can result in discipline and/or in consequences of the actions, but never in punishment.

Notice that Paul says that we are also to bring our children up in the instruction of the Lord. We should teach our children to love God's Word (two meanings: the written word of Scripture and Jesus) and to depend upon God's instructions to us. The Bible is indeed the handbook for life, and it seems rather foolish to exist in this body in a world full of enemies and not study and apply the handbook. The Bible teaches us where to lay up treasures and how to minimize consequences and discipline as we walk in this world as His children. Always remember another verse that we have studied:

Eph 2:10 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

We are created as children of God for the purpose of walking in the works that He has prepared for us before the creation of time. When discipline does come, rejoice in it for it

shows us that indeed we are children of God and He loves us very much, enough to send Jesus Christ to earth to live a perfect life for us and to give His life as a perfect payment for our sins.

Praise the Lord!

We are now dealing with the third of the interactions that Paul discussed, beginning in Chapter five:

1. The wife with the husband and the husband with the wife.
2. The children to the parents and the parents to the children.
3. The slaves to the masters and the masters to the slaves.

Eph 6:5 “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;

Eph 6:6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

Eph 6:7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,

Eph 6:8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

Eph 6:9 And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

Note that Paul does not address whether or not slavery is acceptable. Also note that he did not condone it or endorse it as he did the family relationships (applications 1 and 2 above). What Paul is addressing is how Christians should behave in all possible relationships. At this time in history, roughly half of the people in the Roman occupied territory were slaves. Also in this time of history, the wives and the children had deplorable situations as we noted above. Christianity lifts up all people: men, women, husbands, wives, children, slaves, and masters to a higher level of conduct. In America, there is no open slavery, but we all employed people are in either or both the slave or master category. I have people working under my supervision and thus I am a master in that sense. I also have people that supervise me and I am a slave in that sense. So, no matter what situation one finds himself in, we should function as though we were working for Jesus Christ. The Fellowship of Christian Employees of Kennesaw State University has Ephesians 6: 7-8 on the front page of its web site <http://erkki.kennesaw.edu/FCE/> to serve as a focus for the employees to know whom they are really serving. The second page also lifts up the following Psalm as the traits of the Christian worker.

Psa 15:1 “(A Psalm of David.) O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?

Psa 15:2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.

Psa 15:3 He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

Psa 15:4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the Lord; He swears to his own hurt, and does not change;

Psa 15:5 He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken”.

Being a Christian employee or employer is to be taken very seriously as we have high standards to uphold. Do you know people who do their work “by way of eyeservice, as men pleasers” as stated in Eph 6:6? I am sure that we know people who do their jobs in this manner. They do the minimum amount of work possible and “butter up” to people in authority to try to get away with being minimalist employees. Such people usually also try to gossip about the “real” workers and try to get such good employees in trouble with their supervisors. The Christian “slave” should work as unto the Lord and that means that the Christian worker should be the best employee the organization has. Also note that Paul says the slave should work “**in the sincerity of your heart**”. I love the Latin origin of this word “sincere”. The word comes from the two Latin words “sine cere” which literally means “without wax”. In these times people would hide cracks in pottery with wax and then try to sell the pottery as perfect and thus with a high price. We should have a pure heart in our work ethic and never try to pass off defective work as perfect work.

The “master” should be kind and nonthreatening. The employer should always try to make the workplace seem like a little bit of home where everyone has work to be done, they all do their work joyfully (as unto the Lord), and any needed discipline done by the employer should be done as by a loving father in a home. The passage goes on to say that the Lord shows no partiality. How many work places are like this? I don’t know, but I know that I try to make mine as much like that as possible. I am a department head at a university and I try to treat all my faculty, staff, and students as though we are all one big family. I am the authority in the department and people do their jobs well knowing that I will evaluate them at least at the end of each year. However all the people know that I respect them and value them as human beings.

If our theology is not carried into all aspects of our lives then it is not a Christian theology. Our ethics should be Biblically based and not conformed to the changing moralities of our environment. Christian theology is not just a mental curiosity; it is a way of life as we all try to conform to the image of Jesus Christ in every aspect of our life and at all times.

Rom 8:29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;”

Eph 6:10 “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.

Eph 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Eph 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

“Finally” means that we are approaching the end of this letter. However the meaning of “finally” is not the same as we approach the end of the reading of an assignment in school that we really did not want to do! I have heard people say “Finally, he finished his speech” (I am afraid that I am guilty of thinking this after quite a few speeches that I have heard.) and this finally is not to be interpreted that way either! He is concluding the whole of the Epistle with these last few verses. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote a 373-page book on these four verses and I strongly recommend the book for your reading. The wonderful relationships that Paul wrote of in Ephesians 5 and the first part of Ephesians 6 are impossible to achieve in this world unless we are prepared to fight the spiritual wars that we will encounter in our life voyage. The world tries to minimize this warfare or even to say that it does not exist, but the Bible tells us throughout its pages that this spiritual warfare is real and will continue until God calls an end to this world.

Note that Paul also says that we must put on the **full** armor of God. It is not enough to just put on a chest protector without protecting the back (I certainly have been spiritually stabbed in the back a number of times in my life!). We can’t even leave our toes unprotected. Have you seen how a 350-pound lineman can be put on the bench by “turf toe”? Also note in verse eleven that we have to put on the full armor of God to just “stand firm” against the very worldly, wise ways of Satan. Without the full armor of God, we can be knocked backwards but with the full armor of God we are not promised to be able to make progress, we can only stand firm. Jesus Christ will (in one sense already has) win the war, we can only stand firm and not allow evil to progress past us IF we put on the full armor of God. Note that he repeats this promise of standing firm in verse 13.

Paul tells us the mysterious truth about our life struggles in verse twelve. People might want to ask, “Why can’t we see this struggle?” and I will ask you to go back to our discussion about how we are technically blind in the total electromagnetic spectrum. I am not saying that these spiritual battles are taking place in the microwave region of the electromagnetic spectrum, or any other particular region. I am just reminding us that there is a lot of this universe that we cannot see and the spiritual realm is one of those regions of the universe that we cannot see, but we certainly experience as this verse 12 tells us. I do think that a lot of these battles are taking place **using** the regions of the electromagnetic spectrum in which radio waves and TV transmissions travel! There is so much evil carried on the radio and TV wave regions and we can see and hear the force of these evils.

He also says in this verse that these battles are taking place in the world and in the heavenly places. We see a lot of the results of these wars in the physical wars and horrors that we can see occurring in this world. But we cannot see the causes of these

wars and horrors. It seems like two recent movies “The Maze” and “The Thirteenth Floor” attempt to mimic the spiritual world’s battles affecting the “real” world and they leave you wondering, “What is real?” I have been writing a book for about 16 years on this topic of what is real. I may never finish it, but writing it and thinking about it has given me a lot of insight into our world and how forces are trying to manipulate our reality in favor of evil. The danger of such movies is that they may make us think that such talk about spiritual warfare is just “Hollywood”. The Bible consistently tells us throughout its pages that spiritual warfare is real.

We must learn to recognize spiritual warfare. Many conflicts with people that I have had in my lifetime were really spiritual battles, and when I realized that the battle was really between Jesus and Satan then I could “stand firm”. An example of Jesus recognizing the source of conflict and reacting accordingly is recorded in two verses:

Matt 16:23 “But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

Mark 8:33 “But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.””

We see that even though he spoke to Peter, he was really talking through Peter to the Great Liar, Satan. Peter needed to learn to discern spiritual battles also and Jesus helped him in a very dramatic fashion. None of us can have any success against these evil spiritual forces; only Jesus can be victorious.

Our real enemy is not the equal of God, for Satan is a created being. Satan is not omnipresent, he is not omniscient, and he is not omnipotent. However, he is very powerful and a Christian would be very foolish if he/she thought that he/she could fight Satan or one of his spiritual cohorts alone. The universe is God’s universe and Satan cannot do anything without God’s permission (Job is an excellent book to understand that concept, and there are many more examples in the Scripture). Below I will use the word “Satan” to refer to not just him, but also all of his evil army. In the entire Bible we are only told of six people who were directly tempted by Satan himself: Eve, Job, Jesus Christ, Judas, Peter, and Ananias.

Dr. Boice quotes William Gurnall on some very interesting aspects of when and how Satan and his forces make their attacks and I will utilize some of these below.

1. Satan often attacks when the Christian is newly converted.

Probably most of us can say “amen” to that statement. I remember soon after my conversion that I found out that I was still susceptible to giving in to temptation and the thought came into my mind “Am I really a Christian?” At first I thought that since I was now a child of God that I would be totally different, but Romans 7 helps us to understand that such is not true. We are certainly being changed, but we will never be totally free from the effects of sin in our lives until we are glorified. The new Christian badly needs a support group of more mature Christians and I have seen this process work many times in my life.

2. Satan often attacks when the Christian is afflicted.

Again, I should hear a lot of “amens”. Again, the study of Job presents us with examples of such activity. Job’s “friends” told him that bad things don’t happen to good people so his problems must be as a result of his sins. Even his wife said:

Job 2:9 “Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.”

We can be sure that God has allowed our afflictions, but His reasons are certainly not always because of sin in our life. The Bible records that many of God’s saints suffered persecutions and afflictions such as

2Thess 1:4 “therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.”

2Cor 6:4 “but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

2Cor 6:5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,

2Cor 6:6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,”

Afflictions can help us turn closer to God and to explicitly depend more upon Him. In afflictions, as well as in any circumstance, we should always remember Rom 8:28,29.

3. Satan attacks when the Christian has achieved some notable success.

Again, I say “Amen!” I have seen this happen SO many times in my walk with the Lord. I would be on a mountain top and sometimes even praising God for a notable success in life and “wham!”, here he comes again. I am sure that God let Satan at me when I did not give proper credit to God for the success. I am also sure that even when I did give glory to God, God wanted me to know that we still had much to do and many wars to still fight.

4. Satan attacks when the Christian is idle.

The sin of David and Bathsheba is a prime example of this truism. David should have been at war, but he was idle on his rooftop when he saw Bathsheba and fell into sin with her. We have all heard the phrase “idleness is the Devil’s workshop” and such phrases certainly contain some truth.

5. Satan attacks when the Christian is isolated from other children of God.

We all need some earthly person(s) to whom we are accountable. Even Paul fought the battle of not doing God’s work as he records in Romans chapter 7. We spent a year in Sweden where we had no formal church home, but God brought a missionary family (Ollie and Grace Kautzer and their children) to us so that we could have

Christian fellowship in a pagan country. Instead of slipping in our spiritual growth, as I am sure that I would have, we actually grew much spiritually as we learned as a family to depend more on God and we had the Kautzers for more Christian fellowship. As we were preparing for a year in Sweden, I remember someone telling me “enjoy yourself for no one here will know what you are doing”. I was very insulted at this statement for she did not know me very well at all! I know that God is always watching me! I also fully intended to enjoy myself to the glory of God and it was indeed a wonderful year.

6. Satan attacks when a Christian is dying.

A person dying often is physically weakened and this is a time when Satan can attack. I remember when my mom was dying that one time she looked at a point in the room and said that Satan was here! I assured her that Christ was fully able to take care of Satan. I also was present when Mom’s brother was near death and a “friend” of his was present talking about how much fun the evil times had been. I had the chance to talk to Robert about Christ and how wonderful it was to be a child of God because of the work of Christ.

Satan can also be very crafty in how he attacks, for he can attack:

1. As a roaring lion.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

I had to add verses 9 and 10 for comfort when these attacks occur. Peter is probably referring to how Satan can frighten us and cause us to back up and not stand firm.

2. As a friend.

Again the book of Job contains excellent examples of Satan attacking through Job’s “friends”. I am sure that many of the disciples considered Judas a friend and look how Satan worked through him. I had two “friends” attack me one time as, in their selfish ambition, they tried to make me lose my administrative job. It is really disappointing to have “friends” turn on you, but again these were times when I really learned how to depend upon God and to recognize spiritual battles for what they were. At such times, we can look at the “friend” and say “get thee behind me Satan”.

3. As an angel of light

Martin Luther once said “when you look for the devil, don’t forget to look in the pulpit.” I have seen many instances of this in my life. I saw an Associate Pastor leave his wife and child to go live with another woman and this occurred early in my walk with the Lord. Seeing an Associate Pastor leave the church and his family and go live in sin was really hard on me at the time. This man was also the first man that

I had ever told “I love you” in a Christian way at a church revival, and this man was not really a child of God. Many such occasions have taught me that we certainly do not follow a mere man. We follow Jesus Christ who is God, One of the members of the Trinity. People can, and often do, disappoint us, but Jesus will never disappoint us or fail us in any way:

Heb 13:5 “Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,”

If we trust in ourselves, we will fail. Certainly Peter is an example of such failure near the time of the crucifixion when he said:

Mark 14:29 But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.”

That very night Peter denied his Lord three times. Satan and his evil forces are indeed very powerful, but remember that we serve God who created Satan. A good verse to end this section on is the following:

James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Now we get to the details! It is very important to understand at the very beginning that this armor to which Paul refers is not the armor that God supplies – like the armor of a soldier – but rather it is the armor that God wears. The armor to which Paul refers is actually the armor of God! Paul probably obtained some of the following from the Old Testament in which he had soaked himself, such as the following:

Isa 59:17 “And He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, And wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.”

Eph 6:14 “Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

Eph 6:15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Eph 6:16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Eph 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,”

The truth has to be the truth of God, not the truth of man. The righteousness must also be the righteousness of God as is peace. Faith is not what the world, or even some churchgoers think of faith, but the faith as defined in the Word of God. Salvation is also God’s salvation through the works of Jesus Christ.

During this church age in which we live, the church is referred to as the “church militant”. One day the church will be the “church triumphant”, but now we are at war and if we don’t realize that, we will be badly wounded. Satan has lost us, but now he wants to destroy our usefulness in the kingdom of God. He and his armies are a relentless foe and we must depend upon God, wear His armor, and be vigilant at all times.

Paul mentions six pieces of armor with the first five being defensive:

Armor	Corresponds to
Belt	Truth
Breastplate	Righteousness
Shoes	Readiness of the gospel of peace
Shield	Faith
Helmet	Salvation
Sword	Bible

1. The belt of truth

As a belt holds up the pants (in our case), the truth is the foundation of warfare. If we don’t know the truth for which we are fighting we are easily deceived and also don’t know when part of the truth is being attacked. It is difficult at coffee time before Sunday School to get men to talking about The Truth and how It is important to their lives. However it is easy to get people to talk “how about them Dogs?” or something similar. People know about batting averages, pole positions in car racing, golf records, most yards rushing in a game, etc., but sadly the average churchgoer knows little about the most important truth. We must start with the truth and we must know it well. We must spend time studying It, memorizing It, and applying It to our everyday life. It is first in the list because it is the most important.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

The word for “righteousness” can refer to either imputed righteousness or to a specific act of personal holiness in a Christian’s life. Since Paul is talking to Christians, he is probably referring to the acting out in a Christian’s life of the imputed righteousness from Jesus Christ. Satan can find no fault with Jesus Christ, but he can find much fault with me. I remember a minister one time (Adrian Rogers, I think) talking about the toe holds that Satan can get in a Christian, which are the sins in a person’s life. We can also think about our sins as handles Satan and/or his armies can grab unto to hold us closer to his kingdom. Just as we must work hard to obtain the correct truth of God, we must also work hard to apply the righteousness of Jesus Christ that was imputed to us at our salvation into our walking life here. The more we apply the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our lives, the less “sin holds” there are for Satan and his demons to hold us closer to him. The breastplate covers the heart that has been made new by the rebirth that each of us has experienced. We must protect that heart and act out its new mission in our life.

3. The Gospel of Peace -- Shoes

Now we move beyond mere knowledge and appropriation. The truth we learn is within. The holiness of our life is mainly an inward event. Now we must carry forth into battle our truth and holiness.

*1Peter 3:14 “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,
1Peter 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;”*

Certainly 1 Peter 3:15 clearly expresses the concept that the shoes are representative of our going forth with our truth and righteousness. We are to defend ourselves concerning our truth and righteousness to everyone who asks, but with gentleness and reverence (remember this is the shoe of the gospel of peace). So the “shoe of the gospel of peace” refers to our evangelism and our apologetics, which is our defense of our faith.

4. The Shield of Faith

The Roman soldiers had two kinds of shields. They had the small shield for hand-to-hand combat and they had the very large shield that covered their entire body. It is this shield to which Paul refers. The soldiers would stand side by side so that their shields touched and no arrows could get through to any of them. Thus they were able to hold their ground. This is precisely what Paul is urging us to do. We are to stand shoulder to shoulder with other Christians, each with our shield of faith (you remember what faith is!) and stand firm against the enemy.

5. The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet protects the head. This could mean that we are saved and the fact that we are Children of God will protect our head. However Paul also says in

1Thes 5:8 “But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul is saying that our Christian hope (not like the world’s hope), which looks forward to our definite, complete salvation (glorification), is as a helmet meaning that this knowledge of the certainty of our ultimate success keeps our minds clear and not confused in the face of the fierce enemy. We will have setbacks, but our destiny is secure. I love the following:

2Cor 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves;

2Cor 4:8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

2Cor 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

2Cor 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

Note that God's Word promises that we will be afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. But we are not crushed, perplexed, despairing, forsaken, nor destroyed! This sure knowledge will keep us focused on the battle, and we know that we will be victorious because Jesus has already won the war!

6. The Bible as our Sword, Which is the Word of God

Now we come to an offensive weapon and it is the mightiest weapon in the spiritual war that we are fighting. The word for "word" here is "rhema", which means a specific portion of the word of God. To use this weapon, we must possess the "rhema" and the way to do that is to memorize Scripture. Remember the example of Jesus fighting Satan when He was tempted after His fasting. Jesus fought back three times with specific quotations of Scripture saying "it is written" Against such a weapon Satan was defeated as noted below (underlining is mine).

Matt 4:4 "But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Matt 4:7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matt 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

The Word of God is

a.) Compelling

Only the Word of God can compel people to achieve real meaning in their lives. The greatest books on philosophy or any other topic other than God cannot touch our hearts and compel us to change from within. And even many wonderful books about God cannot compel us as the Word of God can. In all of my writings, I try to turn the reader to the Bible as the only inspired truth.

b.) Convicting

Many times I have finished a Biblical teaching and been told how meaningful and helpful the teaching was to a particular person because it touched them in their point of greatest need at that particular time. I take no credit for such a reaction by the people for it is God Himself Who inspires me to write and talk about the topics and only He knows who is going to be present and need that particular teaching of the Word of God. Often I actually don't even specifically remember teaching the details for which the person is giving me credit. I can't convict anyone for that is what the Holy Spirit does in the life of the believer. I am only an instrument of God lifting up particular passages and interpretations that He has taught me. Again, all credit and power go to God.

c.) Consoling Or Counseling

Every Christian knows many instances in his/her life concerning the specific consoling of the Word of God. I could never finish writing a book of all of the times

that I know about when He has consoled or counseled me through His Word. There are several passages in the Bible recounting how some Christians have consoled other Christians such as after the death of Lazarus:

John 11:19 “and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.”

Now every Christian is armed with the Word of God that we can use to console others and every Christian is able to privately go to the Word of God for that comfort that brings joy to our heart even in very challenging situations.

d.) Converting

No Christian can save anyone. Only God can apply His supernatural powers to a person and cause that person to be born again into the kingdom of God. However, God uses His Word and His people to reach other chosen people. How awesome it is to be privileged to witness a person being turned around by the action of God through His Word. I have seen people actually stop “dead in their tracks” as some Word of God has penetrated their shield and then witnessed the awakening that can be seen in their eyes and their expression as they are born again. How awesome and humbling it is to see God work in a person’s life and then a responsibility is passed to us to help disciple the person as we would help a physically newborn person learn to walk and otherwise use the new physical abilities. The spiritually reborn person suddenly has the awesome power of God on His side and there is much for all of us to learn in this new realm into which God places us.

Against the Word of God there is no defense. A good closing verse shows that only the particular Scripture that we know will be useful for us:

Psa 119:11 “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.”

We must make it a practice to treasure a different “rhema” in our hearts each day.

Are we through now with the armor of God? No, we definitely are not finished arming ourselves for the spiritual warfare we are to face every day that we live.

Eph 6:18 “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Eph 6:19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, Eph 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Eph 6:21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you.

Eph 6:22 And I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

Eph 6:23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 6:24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.”

What is left for our attention? Prayer is the last item Paul brings to our attention in our spiritual war. We will elaborate a bit on this topic, but it is impossible to exhaust a discussion of prayer. There are many excellent books on prayer and I recommend the ones by Morgan, Hand (there is a little Roman Catholic doctrine in his book, but it has some excellent insight into Augustine’s prayer life), and Spear as seen in the References.

Note that Paul tells us that we are to pray:

1. In the Spirit

Why are we to pray in the Spirit? We do not know how to pray or for what to pray totally on our own resources.

Rom 8:26 “And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;”

James 4:3 “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

We have to pray with the mind of God. Suppose that I pray that God would help me to cheat on my income tax so that I would not be caught. Do you suppose that God would give me that request? Of course the answer is no. God would probably show me how such a prayer is counter to His will and the Holy Spirit would convict me of asking such a sinful request. Praying in the Spirit is yielding ourselves to God, so that we can be helped in our pondering of our requests to ensure that our requests are indeed in the will of God.

2. On all occasions

Note the intruding word “all” here. All occasions means all occasions! Most Christians spend very little time each day in prayer and thus are missing out on a vital component of our preparation for warfare. Note what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

2Thes 1:11 “To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power;”

He said that they prayed for these Christians “always”. We should be praying specifically for our Pastor, the Elders, the Teachers, other members of this congregation of believers, and certainly other members of our Sunday School class

”always”. We should pray before and during every meeting that we have, every discussion with our children and/or grandchildren, every day as we men leave work and go home that we may approach home in a Christian manner, before every meeting with anyone (whether unplanned or planned), for the persecuted Christians in some countries, for our missionaries, etc. If this seems like an impossible task, then that is good! Facing an impossible task means that we must pray to the infinite, sovereign Lord of the universe. It is only with Him working in our lives that we can do the seemingly impossible as noted below.

Matt 19:26 “And looking upon them Jesus said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Mark 10:27 “Looking upon them, Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.””

Luke 1:37 “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Luke 18:27 “But He said, “The things impossible with men are possible with God.””

3. With all kinds of prayers AND requests

These two words are not meant in a redundant sense. Requests are a subset of prayers. All requests are made in prayers, but not all prayers are requests. There is a very neat acrostic for the normal steps of a Godly prayer and that is ACTS. A is for adoration, C is for Confession, T is for Thanksgiving, and S is for supplication. It is the last word that is for our requests and certainly Jesus taught us to vocalize our requests to God in Matt 6:11. But our prayer life is VERY weak if it consists only of our requests.

4. Always pray for all the saints with alertness

I mentioned above some of this in that we are to always pray for our Pastor, Elders, other class members, etc. In our Sunday School class and in our church service we are told of some specific prayer requests for fellow Christians and we certainly should pray for them always. Also note the word “alertness” in this aspect of our prayer. To be alert for prayer needs is an obligation of ours in the body of Christ. If we don’t know anyone to pray for then we certainly are admitting that we are too self-centered and not being alert for the needs of others. Prayers are to be specific and we can only pray specifically if we are alert to know of the needs of others. Note that Paul sent Tychicus so that the church members could know of the specific needs of Paul. Please do not every be ashamed to let others know of your needs, for you would be sinning against them by prohibiting them from knowing what to pray specifically for you.

Paul closes this wonderful epistle by praying for his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that they may have peace, love with faith (such can only come from God), and grace. But notice that he makes these prayer requests only for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love. The promises of God are not for everyone. If a non-Christian tries to apply Christian principles to his/her life, there will be no success. Those with an incorruptible love of the Lord Jesus Christ are those who have been chosen by God and who have been born again by the power of

God. Only these people will never fall away from God. Only these people will persevere throughout their lives and will then die to see the Glory of God. This wonderful epistle is written only to those people. Please test yourself to make sure that you are indeed a person with an incorruptible love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2Cor 13:5 "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?"

To you fellow Christians I also pray for love, joy, and peace to be in your hearts and to be practiced in your lives in every second that God has given you to live here before we go into His glory forever. I also pray that this work of love of mine in preparing this little study of this blessed epistle will be of some help in your sanctification. But trust only in God, for He alone will never fail you.

I want to close with this letter that was given to me today (6/8/03) by Sheryl Ketner who is a member of the Sunday School class that I teach.

We are part of the Fellowship of the Unashamed.

*This letter found on a Zimbabwe Pastor's Desk who was martyred for his faith.
Transmitted from Denny Brown of The Mission.*

We are part of the Fellowship of the Unashamed. We have the Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. We have stepped over the line. The decision has been made - We are disciples of His. We won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. Our past is redeemed; our present makes sense, our future secure. We're finished with colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving and dwarfed goals.

We no longer need preeminence, prosperity, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. We don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. We now live by faith, lean in His presence, walk by patience, are lifted up by prayer, and labor with power.

Our face is set, our gait is fast, our goal is heaven, our road is narrow, our way rough, our companions are few, our Guide reliable, our mission clear. We cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. We will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, pander at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

We won't give up, shut up, let up, until we have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. We are disciples of Jesus. We must go till He comes, give till we drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops us. And, when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing us...our banner will be clear. For we are part of the Fellowship of the Unashamed.

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