

LESSON 148: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS



Chapter 5

In this chapter Paul continues his instruction on how believers are to live. Our salvation is based on the holiness of Christ, not on what we do. But, being assured of our salvation, we should be continually pursuing a life of personal holiness, becoming more and more Christ like.

Ephesians 5:1-2 So be imitators of God, as his dear children. (2) Live lovingly, just as the Messiah also loved us and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice, a fragrant aroma to God.

- Like a child imitates his parents, we ought to imitate our heavenly Father. And we imitate God by walking (living) in love. This love is sacrificial, as shown by Christ when He gave up Himself for us.

Ephesians 5:3-4 Do not let sexual sin, impurity of any kind, or greed even be mentioned among you, as is proper for saints. (4) Obscene, flippant, or vulgar talk is totally inappropriate. Instead, let there be thanksgiving.

- These things are all self-centered behavior and speech, which is the opposite of the sacrificial love we should be living by. Paul says there shouldn't even be a hint of these sins in our lives.
- "Obscene" means "shameless talk and conduct". "Flippant" is literally "stupid words". "Vulgar" talk could also be translated "coarse jesting" or "frivolous wit". So what's wrong with that if it's all in fun? This kind of talk is inappropriate for followers of Jesus because it can often turn harmful or cruel (also refer back to verse 29 in chapter 4).
- Paul is not saying that humor and funny speech itself is sin, but if it is used to tear down others, it is.
- We should replace this kind of talk with "thanksgiving". In other words, telling people how much you appreciate them, which is more helpful and encouraging to people.

Ephesians 5:5-7 For you know very well that no immoral or impure person, or anyone who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God. (6) Do not let anyone deceive you with meaningless words, for it is because of these things that God becomes angry with those who disobey. (7) So do not be partners with them.

- One reason we should not do these things is because we would be acting like immoral or impure people, and those people are not going to be in the Kingdom. Instead we should be acting like Christ, and people would see Him in us. If we act the same as everyone else in the world, then we have no witness for Christ. People should be able to see the difference in us. Also read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
- Isn't it interesting that Paul equates greed, or coveting, with idolatry, which is because greed, like idols, put things before God or even replace God in our hearts. In this respect, anything in your life can potentially be an idol for you. This can be the love of material things, or worshipping the creation instead of the Creator (Romans 1:25). Almost anything can replace God in our hearts.
- Paul says don't let anyone fool you, God takes these things seriously. These people will receive the wrath of God, so we don't want to act like them or be associated with them.

Ephesians 5:8-9 For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, (9) for the fruit that the light produces consists of every form of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

- The reason we are not to be partners with unbelievers is because they are still in darkness, and we have been rescued out of that darkness. Since we are now children of light (our new nature is spiritual light), we should be living like it. We should be producing good fruit, which is “every form” of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Ephesians 5:10-12 Determine what pleases the Lord, (11) and have nothing to do with the unfruitful actions that darkness produces. Instead, expose them for what they are. (12) For it is shameful even to mention what is done by these disobedient people in secret.

- How do we determine what pleases the Lord? See Romans 12:1-2, and Colossians 1:10. “Determine” here means “putting to the test”, “approving”, or “discerning”.
- Sinful actions produce no fruit, because they’re not helpful to anyone.
- Believers are not to compromise with the darkness, but expose it, shed light on it. Does this mean we go around criticizing and judging people? No it means that we live the lives we should be living as children of light, then that automatically exposes the darkness. Darkness doesn’t go away until you shed light on it.

Ephesians 5:13-14 But everything that is exposed to the light becomes visible, (14) for the light is making everything visible. That is why it says, "Wake up, sleeper! Arise from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you."

- “That is why it says” – if this is a quotation from the Old Testament it must be a very loose one. It could be based on Isaiah 60:1-3, or he could be referring to a common saying among believers in that time, or a popular hymn that was sung.
- A believer who has committed acts of darkness should wake up and rise from the dead. Unbelievers do these things and they are dead spiritually. So if a believer does these things he is acting like a dead person. Read also 1 John 1:5-7.

Ephesians 5:15-16 So, then, be careful how you live. Do not be unwise but wise, (16) making the best use of your time because the times are evil.

- We are to walk (live) carefully, being wise and competent, that’s what pleases the Lord. The way we walk carefully is making the right use of every opportunity (see Colossians 4:5, Psalm 90:10-12). Time is precious and should not be wasted because the times are evil. Many people are lost in darkness, and since the time is short we should make full use of our time to help turn them from darkness to light. To do this we have to live wisely.

Ephesians 5:17-18 Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (18) Stop getting drunk with wine, which leads to wild living, but keep on being filled with the Spirit.

- The word translated “drunk with wine” can also be translated “debauchery”, “excess”, or “dissipation”. So Paul is talking about more than just getting drunk, but about anything that causes you to act abnormally and lose control of yourself. This is a foolish waste of time and is not a wise way to live. Instead we should “keep on being filled with the Spirit”. That way instead of trying to control ourselves we allow the Spirit to control us.

- The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event that happens the moment we trust Christ as our Savior. This is when the Spirit regenerates us, indwells us, seals us, and places us into the body of Christ. The filling is a continual decision on our part to allow Him to control our lives. Are we going to insist on running our lives the way we want, being the boss? Or are we going to allow Christ to be Lord, that is the question.
- Putting it another way, every Christian has all the Spirit, but the command here is that the Spirit have all of him. So the way to walk wisely is to allow the Holy Spirit's control. The more we are yielded to the Lord, the more fruit we will produce. We need the filling of the Spirit to be able to serve Christ. It's something we should all do as we start every day – Lord please fill me up with your Spirit!
- Here's one way you can do it, by praying: Lord, I want to walk today in the Spirit. I can't do it myself. I need your power. I need your help. I give you control of my life today, please use me for your glory.

Ephesians 5:19-21 Then you will recite to one another psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; you will sing and make music to the Lord with your hearts; (20) you will consistently give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah; (21) and you will submit to one another out of reverence for the Messiah.

- Paul then gives four things that happen when we are filled with the Spirit:
 - We will communicate with each other using psalms (Old Testament Psalms sung with instruments), hymns (praises written by Christians), and spiritual songs (other generally spiritual songs).
 - We will communicate with the Lord by singing and making music to the Lord with our hearts.
 - We will be continually thanking God for all things.
 - We will submit to other believers and serve them (rather than trying to dominate them or act like we are above them).
- Not to condemn worldly music, but when you allow the Spirit to fill you, spiritual music becomes more important to you. You become more sensitive to meanings of songs, and your spirit delights in hearing music that proclaims the truth. Spiritual music can be uplifting, inspiring, convicting, and can draw you closer to the Lord.
- Next, Paul is going to explain further about this idea of submission to each other:

Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord. (23) For the husband is the head of his wife as the Messiah is the head of the church. It is he who is the Savior of the body. (24) Indeed, just as the church is submissive to the Messiah, so wives must be submissive to their husbands in everything.

- This is a controversial passage with some people, but it really shouldn't be. You'll notice that the context of this section is that husbands and wives must submit to each other. "Submit" does not mean "obey", and submission does not mean inferiority. It means that the wife recognizes that her husband is the head of the home and respects that without trying to take his authority for herself. God has established a natural order for personal relationships in a household, and if it is followed, there will be harmony in the house. If not, there will be difficulties.
- Wives are to submit to the leadership of their husbands in the home (v. 22, 24); they are to respect their husbands (v. 33); they are to love their husbands (Titus 2:4) and live with them until death (Romans 7:2-3).
- "As to the Lord" does not mean a wife should submit to her husband the same way she submits to the Lord, but that her submission to her husband itself is serving the Lord.

- We submit to each other in love, and out of reverence for God. It's not about obeying someone else's commands or lording it over them. The only person we obey is Christ, and that is in love.

Ephesians 5:25-27 **Husbands, love your wives as the Messiah loved the church and gave himself for it, (26) so that he might make it holy by cleansing it, washing it with water and the word, (27) and might present the church to himself in all its glory, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but holy and without fault.**

"God never asked a woman to submit to any man who doesn't love her like this." J. Vernon McGee

- Husbands are to love their wives, lead them (v. 23), teach them in the things of Christ, and live with them faithfully for life (Matthew 19:3-9).
- The Greek word for "love" (agapaō) here means seeking the highest good for another person. It's the same unselfish love that Christ had when He gave Himself up for the church.
- There is no spotless church in existence today, that will happen in the future when Christ returns, and "we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2).
- The church is known as the "bride" of Christ. Human brides prepare themselves for their husbands, but notice Christ prepares His own bride for Himself.

Ephesians 5:28-29 **In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies. A man who loves his wife loves himself. (29) For no one has ever hated his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, as the Messiah does the church.**

- Just as the church is an extension of Christ, a wife is an extension of her husband. They are one flesh, so the husband must care for his wife as his own body.

Ephesians 5:30-33 **For we are parts of his body—of his flesh and of his bones. (31) "That is why a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh." (32) This is a great secret, but I am talking about the Messiah and the church. (33) But each individual man among you must love his wife as he loves himself; and may the wife fear her husband.**

- Quoting from Genesis 2:24, Paul is saying that the bond between a husband and wife is a very deep and mysterious thing, even greater than the bond between a parent and child. Jesus also quoted this verse in Matthew 19:5-6, talking about the permanence of marriage.
- I believe that the implication here is that the God-ordained structure of the marriage relationship only works if the husband loves his wife properly, as Christ loves the church. Notice Paul said "Husbands, love your wives" three times here (v. 25, 28, 33). That is the key. Pastor J. Vernon McGee said that he had done a great deal of marriage counseling in his day, and he found that about 75% of the fault in marriages was caused by the husbands.
- If the husband is not nourishing and tenderly caring for his wife, if he is not fulfilling his role as leader of his household, and especially if he is not obeying Christ, then the wife will have difficulty submitting to him, and many times will feel that she has to assume the role of head of the home.

Chapter 6

Ephesians 6:1-3 **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. (2) "Honor your father and mother..." (This is a very important commandment with a promise.) (3) "...so that it may go well for you, and that you may have a long life on the**

earth."

- Paul quotes the 5th commandment (Exodus 20:12) to confirm the importance of children obeying their parents, and then says that this commandment comes with a promise! The promise is that, if you obey your parents, you will enjoy a prosperous and long life on the earth. This is logical if you think about it. A person who disciplines themselves at a young age to obey and honor their parents will also generally be self-disciplined in other areas the rest of their lives, and this, barring an unforeseen tragedy, will ensure a stable and long life. A rebellious undisciplined person generally does not live a long life. This principle has always been true.
- When a child marries, his relationship to his parents changes (5:31) but not his responsibility to provide for them (1 Timothy 5:4).

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up by training and instructing them about the Lord.

- Paul mentions only fathers here because they are the head of the household and they are the ones primarily responsible for the teaching of the children, but this could also apply to mothers, who also participate in the training, and many times end up doing the majority of it (see Proverbs 1:8).
- It is interesting that the first reference in the Bible to teaching has to do with Abraham's responsibility to bring up his own son in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Genesis 18:19). One of the signs of the evil times is that society has minimized the importance of children having a father at home. Here we see that God thinks it is all-important.
- "Provoke your children to anger" – can also mean "exasperate", by unreasonable demands or expectations, petty rules, or favoritism. Paul says in Colossians 3:21 that this kind of treatment will cause a child to become discouraged, or lose heart.
- Instead, a parent is to "bring them up" - this would be providing for both their physical and spiritual needs, "by training" – this means "child discipline", including directing, guiding, and correcting, and "instructing them about the Lord", which would include teaching them about God and His Word. The Lord is to be the center of those relationships and of their teaching and learning.
- Note there is no admonishment to make sure you leave the spiritual and secular training of your children to others. No, the primary responsibility of the training of your children, especially their spiritual instruction lies with the parents. Sunday school and other teachers should only be a supplement to what the parents are teaching their children at home. If our children grow up with wrong ideas about God and about the world, we have only ourselves to blame, not the public schools or the church, as bad as they might be.

Ephesians 6:5-8 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear, trembling, and sincerity, as when you obey the Messiah. (6) Do not do this only while you're being watched in order to please them, but be like slaves of the Messiah, who are determined to obey God's will. (7) Serve willingly, as if you were serving the Lord and not merely people, (8) because you know that everyone will receive a reward from the Lord for whatever good he has done, whether he is a slave or free.

- Slavery is so repugnant to us today, but it was so much a part of the Roman Empire in Paul's day, which is probably why neither Paul nor Jesus ever spoke out against it. They both did stress how important it was for both masters and slaves or servants to show true Christian love for each other. It is important to remember that Christian principles eventually changed society in Europe and America and ended slavery.

- Today we can take these commands in the context of workers and employers. In our jobs we should always be honest and sincere in dealing with each other, and always work hard even when our bosses aren't watching us. We should think of our work as serving the Lord, not just people, and God promises a reward for this kind of service in our everyday work, no matter where it is. So, no matter if you have a good job or a bad job, a good boss or a bad boss, your ultimate boss is the Lord, and He will reward you, even if you don't get rewarded by your earthly boss.

Ephesians 6:9 Masters, treat your slaves the same way. Do not threaten them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

- Masters, or bosses, are to treat their slaves, or workers, in the same way, to treat them the way the Lord would want them to. They are to treat them justly and fairly (see Colossians 4:1; James 5:4) because they themselves are servants, with a Master who should be an example to them. This, of course, is the Lord Jesus, and He is the Master over both earthly masters and slaves. He treats everyone the same, whatever your rank or class.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord, relying on his mighty strength. (11) Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the devil's strategies. (12) For our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm.

- Paul is going to close his letter by telling us about resources we have in the Lord that help us stand against evil spiritual powers. First of all, we should always rely not on our own strength, but on His mighty and unending strength. Notice that Paul says it is a struggle, we can expect it to be. Some translations use the word "wrestle". It is a fight, and we need to know how to defend ourselves. We cannot do it in our own strength, but we must let the Lord fight for us.
- Then Paul mentions "the whole armor of God", which will help us stand firm against the devil's strategies. The interesting thing is that this armor is always available to us, but it is our responsibility to "put it on". And it is not our armor, but the armor of God!
- Paul is going to describe this armor in detail, and he may have gotten the idea for using the "armor" metaphor from being in prison with armed guards around him all the time.
- Verse 12 tells us who are enemies are (Yes, we do have enemies!). The fight is not physical, but a spiritual one. But it is just as real, we are in the middle of a real war, and you can see that the devil has strategies or schemes that he uses against us. His schemes have been effective against people for thousands of years. He cannot take our salvation from us, but if we don't put on the armor of God we can be discouraged, made to doubt, and made ineffective in our Christian walk.
- Paul lists what is generally agreed to be different ranks of fallen angels – rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and evil spiritual forces. The first two, rulers and authorities, have been mentioned already in 1:21 and 3:10. God created "an innumerable company of angels" (Hebrews 12:22), and apparently at least a third of this host of beings have followed Satan in his long war against God and His people (Revelation 12:4, 7). Some of the more powerful demons have authority and power over certain areas, nations, or cities. You can see an example of this is Daniel 10. Others have specific duties to cause havoc and tragedy in the world. We can assume that there is a group whose responsibility is to attack the church. In any case, Satan's organization is powerful and well organized. There are things going on in the world, demonic

manifestations, that most people are unaware of or choose to ignore as unreal.

- Satan and his minions are working overtime these days because he knows his time is short. We know that the war is already won, we're just waiting for Christ to come back and finish it once and for all. But until then there will always be battles. The enemy is not going to give up, and the most intense attacks come against the church.

Ephesians 6:13-17 For this reason, take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to take a stand whenever evil comes. And when you have done everything you could, you will be able to stand firm. (14) Stand firm, therefore, having fastened the belt of truth around your waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and being firm-footed in the gospel of peace. (16) In addition to having clothed yourselves with these things, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to put out all the flaming arrows of the evil one, (17) also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

- First of all, it's important to understand that Christians are not told to attack Satan, or advance against him; they are only to "stand" or hold the territory Christ and His body, the church, have already conquered. More about this later.
- Before a Roman soldier put on his armor, he put a belt around his waist. This held his clothing together and gave him a place to hang his armor. The belt of truth stands for not only the facts of the gospel but to subjective truth, a believer's integrity and faithfulness. As a soldier's belt or sash gave comfort and freedom of movement, so the truth gives us freedom with ourselves, others, and God.
- The breastplate of righteousness isn't only our justification, which we were given at our conversion (Romans 3:24; 4:5), but it is also the sanctifying righteousness of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30) which we live out. Like a soldier's breastplate protected his chest from an enemy's attacks, righteous living (Romans 6:13; 14:17) guards our hearts against the assaults of the devil (see also Isaiah 59:17; James 4:7).
- Verse 15 isn't speaking of the spreading of the gospel, because Christians are pictured in verses 10-16 as standing, not advancing. This actually means a believer's stability or surefootedness from the gospel which gives him peace so he can stand in the battle.
- The shield of a Roman soldier, made of wood, was about 2 1/2' wide and 4' long. It was overlaid with linen and leather or metal, to absorb or deflect fiery arrows. So it also protected the other pieces of the armor; that's why Paul used the phrase "in addition to" (verse 16). The shield is our faith. The idea, then, is that a Christian's steadfast faith in the Lord can stop and extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one aimed at him. (for "evil one", Satan, see John 17:15; 1 John 5:19.)
- A helmet, being hot and uncomfortable, was put on by a soldier only when he faced the possibility of real danger. Having a helmet on gives a sense of safety, so the helmet of salvation means both present safety from the devil's attacks and the knowledge that our future deliverance is assured, "the hope of salvation as a helmet" (1 Thessalonians. 5:8).
- Finally, a Roman soldier would take up his sword, usually his only offensive weapon. It is the sword "of the Spirit", so it is given by the Holy Spirit, and Paul says that it is the Word of God. "Word" (rhēma; see also Ephesians 5:26; Romans 10:8, 17; 1 Peter 1:25) refers to the preached Word or can also be an expression of God through the Holy Spirit in the heart. Believers need this "sword" to defend against the enemy's assault, like Christ did three times when tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). Also read Hebrew 4:12.

Ephesians 6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times with every kind of prayer and request. Likewise, be alert with your most diligent efforts and pray for all the saints.

- Prayer is one of the most effective methods of spiritual warfare. It is both our most powerful weapon and our best defense against attacks of the enemy. Our prayers literally move God and His angels to fight for us. We should pray at all times, all kinds of prayers and requests.
- Like a good soldier, we should also stay alert. The word for “alert” here means “in all persistence”. So we should persistently be praying, not just for ourselves and family but for “all the saints”.

Ephesians 6:19-20 Pray also for me, so that, when I begin to speak, the right words will come to me. Then I will boldly make known the secret of the gospel, (20) for whose sake I am an ambassador in chains, desiring to declare the gospel as boldly as I should.

- Paul was going to be on trial before Caesar in Rome. The Romans looked on the Christians as a sect of the Jews, and the Jews considered them a heretical group. In his trial Paul needed to make clear that Christians are neither a Jewish sect nor a heretical group but a new entity, the church, the body of Christ, composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers.
- Finally, Paul closes his letter with some personal encouragement:

Ephesians 6:21-24 So that you may know what has happened to me and how I am doing, Tychicus, our dear brother and a faithful minister in service to the Lord, will tell you everything. (22) I am sending him to you for this very reason, so that you may know how we are doing and that he may encourage your hearts. (23) May peace and love, with faith, be with the brothers, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah! (24) May grace be with all who sincerely love the Lord Jesus, the Messiah!