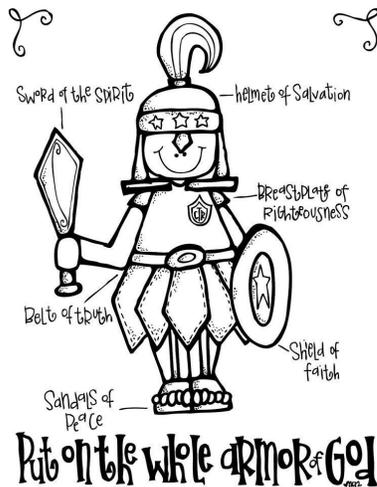


Session #10: Ephesians Chapter 6:1-17

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With our last study we began our walk-through St. Paul's "household code of conduct". He first approaches the challenges of being a wife and husband as Christ would want that relationship to look. Today we continue in that conversation as we look at further direction into the home. Today we discuss the instruction given first to children and parents, then to slaves and masters. While we here in the 21st century understand that slavery is not of God we can easily interpret the ideas by thinking in terms of anyone who has authority over us or when we are in a position to have authority over others.

As we move forward into today's study there are several points to keep in mind:

1. First and foremost, we must remember how this section began with the teaching of submission. *"Be subordinate to one another out of reverence to Christ."* (Ephesians 5:21) This is the foundation upon which Christians are to base ALL their relationships. We are to approach it as one of service to the other.
2. St. Paul talks to each group as if all are equal. As we discussed last week, in the 1st century, women, children and slaves were all property. It would have been expected for St. Paul speaking only to the master/husband/parent and inform them his expectations of the "underlings" conduct. St. Paul shows his respect for each of these "lesser beings" by directing his comments directly to them.
3. Another unexpected honor is that St. Paul directs his comments FIRST to women, children and slaves talking to the husband/parent/master second. Protocol of the day would have him talking first to those with authority and if he must then to the lesser.
4. St. Paul challenges the culture of the time by asking masters/husbands to be merciful, compassionate and considerate to those in their charge; essentially to treat them like people rather than possessions.
5. St. Paul teaches to all six, wives & husbands, children & parents, slaves & masters to base their understanding on what it means to be a believer by asking them to reflect on Christ. Christ is the model

Some individuals hold that these teachings give support for the idea of slavery or the continued attitude of ownership of another including wives and children. Some scholars suggest that St. Paul, in his wisdom recognized that Christianity, if it were to survive, needed to fit within the template of the culture that existed at the time. In fact it is only within recent decades, some 2000 years later that some can recognize that gender roles and authority relationships should no longer be the order of the day. Were he to speak today his message would probably be different.

Not in using Christ as a model but condemning any relationship that victimizes, abuses or exploits another human being.

Children & Parents 6:1-4

6:1 Children, obey your parents

No surprises here. Obedience is the expectation for all who are without power. But St. Paul adds more. He goes on to write **(in the Lord) for it is right**. This short phrase places obedience within a context. That context is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We do this not only because it is the “right” thing to do but because we belong to the righteous. The Greek word St. Paul uses is *dikaiois* which is better translated to righteous or just. We therefore are called as children to obey our parents because in our relationship with Jesus Christ because it is the virtuous and upright thing to do. By the way, as adults we are no longer obligated to obey our parents but we must always treat them with love and respect. We honor them because they gave us the gift of life.

6:2-3 Honor your father and mother

Everyone should recognize this phrase as the fourth of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). We read in 1 Timothy 5:8: *whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*. But St. Paul does not leave it at simply reminding us of the commandment. He goes on to remind us that **This is the first commandment with a promise**. If it is not enough to know that honoring our parents is the will of God, St. Paul offers a motivation: **that it may go well with you and you may have a long life on earth**. Want a long life blessed by God? Then do right by your parents. Scientific studies have shown that family harmony does lead to well-being in the home. Happy home leads to less stress. Less stress and one has a healthier life. But we all know there are many factors in living a long life. Many of the saints did not. Which brings us to a better translation of the phrase *life on earth*. Some scholars suggest the better translation would be to read: *you may have a long life in the land*. What land? The Promised Land. Our eternal reward, heaven.

6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger

St. Paul now turns his attention to the parents. In the 1st century, males had absolute power especially in the home. Many abused that dominance by being inconsiderate, disrespectful and self-serving. St. Paul begins this simple teaching by first telling parents what not to do – don’t provoke anger. If you remember, in chapter four of this study we looked at St. Paul’s teaching regarding anger (4:26-27; 31). When we lay too heavy of a burden on our children through destructive discipline or expecting unreasonable restraint or control, we create tears in the relationship that come out in a number of ways, one being anger. So, what are we to do? This leads into the second part of this verse and the second part of St. Paul’s teaching to parents: **bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord**. How is one to do that? Let us turn to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

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- **2222** Parents must regard their children as *children of God* and respect them as *human persons*. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.
- **2223** Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them
- **2225** Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of *evangelizing their children*. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life.

St. Paul, in offering this teaching assumes that his Jewish Christian audience would remember the teachings of Moses to speak the word of God to their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) and to drill it into their hearts (Deuteronomy 6:7). All this said we who have adult children can look back over our parenting years and beat ourselves up with the "should have's" of our own human failings. We need to remember we do the best we can with what we have. We also need to acknowledge that our contemporary culture, which consumes many of our adult children, is at battle for their attention. And frankly, it is easier to go along with the crowd than to stand against it. Doesn't make it right but hopefully brings some ease to our hearts.

Slaves and Masters 6:5-9

A word about slavery in the 1st century. In the time of Jesus and St. Paul, slavery was a fact of life and the economy of the world depended on it. In the 1st century about one-third of the human population was bound in slavery. It was not based on race and you became a slave in one of three ways:

1. Inability to pay debts owed. At some point the justice system intervened and you (and sometimes immediate family) were made a slave to the one you owed money to, or you and/or your family were sold at auction with the money going to the other to pay off your debt.
2. Captured as prisoners of war. It was the common custom for the victorious army to bring back inhabitants of their defeated land to function as slaves in their household.

3. Born into slavery. In that slaves had the right to marry, their offspring belonged to the master.

While slaves were considered the property of their master, their living conditions depended on the type of work they did and the temperament and status of their master. Some did physical labor while others were educated as craftsmen, physicians, architects, scribes and teachers. Slaves in the 1st century did have rights. They could marry, acquire money, own property and even buy their freedom. It was often customary for the master to free some of his “favorite” slaves with his impending death or as a reward for some grand accomplishment of the slave. While slavery in the Roman Empire was not the will of God, it was more humane than what we have heard regarding the horrors of slavery here in this country in 18th and 19th century and continues to exist throughout the world.

6:5 Slaves, be obedient

The first and foundational teaching from St. Paul is to call for a slave to be obedient. A word we have heard already in regard to children towards their parents (6:1). This obedience is demanded but with a nuance: **as to Christ**. As spoken about last session, the attitude of obedience is in practice before God. Compliance to another’s will or request provides opportunities for us to train our wills to be obedient to God. St. Paul goes on to describe the slaves attitude saying to do what you are told to do **with fear and trembling**. As Catholics we might remember this as one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; to have fear before the Lord. This is an Old Testament concept that refers to the reverence we are to show before the power of God. Maybe St. Paul understood something about stroking the egos of those in authority. But the action, St. Paul goes on to say, should be done **in sincerity of heart** meaning with an attitude of genuine respect.

6:6 not only when being watched

This idea carries over from the previous verse in calling all to have the right attitude in obedience. I remember as a Junior High student a teacher was called to the office or out into the hall to confer with the principal. We were instructed to read quietly or work quietly until their return. The student closest to the door would “keep watch” so that everyone else could talk, move from their seats, or do as they pleased. Our belief was that the teacher was none the wiser. St. Paul is challenging this idea that the eyes we should be concerned about are not the direct authority over us (boss, teacher, employer) but to do what is asked because it pleases God that we do so. Obedience should be motivated **in sincerity of heart... from the heart**. Our will choosing to do the right thing. And we do this right thing because in truth we all are **slaves to Christ**. In faith we are to recognize that we have been “bought” by the blood of Christ. We belong to Him. Moses spoke of his relationship to God as being a slave to God’s will and purpose (1 Kings 8:53; Nehemiah 10:30). St. Paul uses the imagery of slavery in talking about his relationship with Jesus (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10). As we have discussed in session nine, all Christians are to be in service to those around us. *Identifying oneself as a slave of Christ, called to whole-hearted service, is a spiritual attitude that can benefit any Christ bound to a task he or she did not choose.* Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Ephesians.

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6:7-8 *willingly serve the Lord*

St. Paul goes on to recognize that some masters are not kind in their authority requiring a great deal of hardship in the life of the slave. He begins by offering the slave a way of coping, by focusing their service as if doing what they are doing for the Lord, someone they love and want to obey. And to keep mindful that while in this sinful world there may not be justice, in the next each will receive their fitting reward in the next. The owner may not appreciate or recognize the work but God sees all things and will reward richly the good that has been done.

6:9 *Masters, act in the same way towards them*

In this final verse of the section, St. Paul directs his comments to those who own slaves. This is another statement that we hear but don't often appreciate how counter-cultural the statement is. St. Paul is calling Masters to be slaves to their servants. Not in the way of the slaves now run the show but in recognition that they are to treat everyone as they themselves would expect to be treated – with respect and kindness and understanding. St. Paul gets very specific in challenging owners to **stop bullying**. It was the common practice for a slave owner to maintain order and obedience by threatening beatings or harsh working and living conditions, through humiliation and abuse. St. Paul is asking masters to remember that in the eyes of God master and slave are equal.

...knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality.

Final comment: While this conversation regarding slaves and masters may not speak to our present sensibilities since we do not own slaves nor are we slaves. But, if we were to go back through this teaching and replace the word slave with "employee" and master with the word "boss" we can understand the message of St. Paul. We may not like what we are being asked to do but the boss has the right to ask it. As people of faith our call is to serve with an attitude of Christ, willingly and obediently (as long as it is not immoral or against God's teachings). And bosses, rather than create suffering to those who you have authority over, recognize the Christ within each of your employees and treat them with respect and Christian charity.

Calling the Faithful to Battle 6:10-17

As we bring today's study to a close we find St. Paul providing a summery teaching for each and every group he has addressed in this letter. As we read this next few verses think of St. Paul as a football coach speaking to each of us as his players during half time. Our side is ahead (because of the cross of Christ) but the coach (St. Paul) doesn't want his players to become lazy or apathetic thinking that because we are winning the game we no longer have to put in any effort. St. Paul reminds us to remain strong and dedicated to doing all we can to be the best we can be so that we can achieve our goal.

6:10 *Finally, draw your strength from the Lord*

As St. Paul brings his letter to a close he offers some direction but reminding his readers of statements already made. How are we to draw strength in the Lord? As stated in 1:3-14, by knowing that we are "in Christ", by

growing up “in every way into him who is the head” (4:15) and by putting on “the new self” (4:24) In doing all this we will be united in **his mighty power**.

6:11 Put on the armor of God

Now we move into what is one of my most favorite passages of St. Paul. Here he begins to create the image that we as Christians must see ourselves as soldiers in a battle for our soul. By using the words “Put on” he once again draws on the image of baptism and the “putting on” of the white baptismal garment after stepping out of the water. This garment is meant to signify the “new self” now cleansed in the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ. As we further explore this section we will see that St. Paul will describe this armor. Keep in mind, as we discuss, this armor is meant for both defensive and offensive strategy. And who is the opposing force? **So that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil**. Our battle has already been won but St. Paul’s concern is that each “player” not fall victim to any of the devil’s plays and be taken out of the game.

6:12 For our struggle is not with flesh and blood

This battle is waged not with another person of flesh and blood or even our own human weaknesses. This battle we walk into is with the demonic ranks that exercise their power in the world (Ephesians 1:21; 2:2). In these next few verses St. Paul identifies six different pieces of a soldier’s equipment and makes each of them represent an attitude or practice that will enable Christians to prevail in the spiritual battle.

6:13 put on the armor of God

St. Paul repeats his call to arms. From his time as a prisoner of Rome St. Paul would remember well the armor that his captors wore and his audience would have no problem picturing what St. Paul is describing. The armor includes both defensive as well as offensive pieces. There is precedence set for St. Paul to use this military imagery in the Old Testament. Isaiah (11:1-11; 10:24-34) speaks of the Messiah clothed with God’s attributes of justice and fithfulness, acting to rescue God’s people and destroy the wicked. Isaiah 59:14-21 depicts God himself armed as a warrior fighting on behalf of His people. To “cloth” ourselves in God’s armor means for us to embrace the attitudes and actions that will make us victorious in faith.

Note that the first three pieces of equipment cover parts of the body: from the waste down, from the waist up and the feet.

6:14 stand fast with your loins girded in truth (belt of truth)

The belt of truth is actually a leather apron soldiers would wear that wrapped around their waste and would protect their midsection and thighs. Again, in Isaiah we read about the Messiah: *His loins will be girded with righteousness and his sides clothed with truth*. This is the first time we hear St. Paul speak of truth in Ephesians. So our first step as soldiers is to wrap ourselves in truth we learn from the scriptures and have it guide our actions and words which hopefully are always spoken in compassion and truth.

Righteousness as a breastplate

This would be the metal armor that would cover the chest to protect the heart and lungs. Isaiah 59:17 describes the Lord putting on a breastplate of righteousness when he comes to judge wickedness and save those who turn from

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evil. We have discussed in chapter four St. Paul's teaching on putting on the "new self" and living in a new manner. St. Paul is calling for Christians to "cloth" themselves in righteousness, meaning in living in right relationship with God and one another as a way of protecting their hearts from being pierced by the actions of the devil. To live in righteousness is consistent with living as the "new self".

6:15 shod in readiness for the gospel of peace

The sandals not only offered some protection for the shin, but more importantly to equip them for the traveling these men did. The Roman soldiers marched from place to place often being required to travel great distances. Rather than think of footwear, St. Paul is hoping that his audience is recalling yet another passage of Isaiah (52:7):

*How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"*

Each and every believer, in the time of Christ to this very day is meant to proclaim the good news throughout the earth. Not only in action but in word as well. Whether at school, work, shopping mall or home, we are on a mission to proclaim the good news of God's salvation to the ends of the earth. As a "soldier" of Christ we are always to be ready to explain our reason for our hope of salvation. Interestingly, while sharing our faith with others may be difficult it strengthen our own faith.

Next we will have the three most important items of the armor.

6:16 In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield

Roman soldiers held a large shield, four feet tall and 2.5 feet wide to protect the whole body from arrows and spears. This shield was made from wood covered in thick leather. The leather could be soaked in water to quench arrows tipped in flaming pitch. In the Old testament God is described as the shield of his people (Genesis 15:1; Psalms 5:13; 18:3). In urging his readers to take up the shield of faith, St. Paul is summoning all Christians to believe firmly in God and His word, especially under attack. The **flaming arrows of the evil one** refers to all the devil's assaults, whether external (through persecution or trial) or internal (temptations to doubt, fall into despair or fear).

6:17 take the helmet of salvation

Roman soldiers wore a helmet of bronze to protect their heads from fatal blows. We read in Isaiah 59:17 the Lord wears "salvation as the helmet on his head". In God's case, the helmet of "salvation" is not needed for protection but to reveal his identity: He is the one who brings salvation. For us and St. Paul's readers, receiving this piece of armor means putting our hope in God to save us. That a helmet protects the head is

perhaps intended as an encouragement to guard our minds with hope for the future, confident that God will act to save us.

the sword of the Spirit

It is interesting to note that this is the first and only mention of an offensive weapon. The sword that Roman soldiers used as a short sword for hand to hand combat. What scholars suggest is that we are to understand this image in two ways. We are to listen and study the word of God which will strengthen us by the power of the Holy Spirit. But we must also speak the word of God which can be a powerful defense both for ourselves and against the tricks of evil. The sword is a offensive weapon as well in that we are to advance the kingdom of God by proclaiming the good news.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you think that Christian parents should discipline their children differently? If so how?
2. In reflecting on the conversation of slaves and masters in light of employee/employer, what new insights do you have on being in the work place?
3. Do you believe in the reality of Spiritual Warfare? How has today's study helped you?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Duties of Children: 2214-2220

Duties of Parents: 2221-2231

Prohibition Against Slavery: 2414, 2424

Diabolic Activity: 395

Jesus defeats Satan: 550

Battling the Powers of Evil: 409, 1707,2015

Deliver us from evil: 2850-2854,

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