

# STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

## STUDY SIX: Ephesians 6:1-24

### Study Six, Part One

<sup>1</sup>Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup>"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— <sup>3</sup>"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

**6:1** – Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord.” What does this mean? I don’t think that wives can submit, husbands can love or children can obey apart from being in the Lord. These are not just good ideas to be implemented in the strength of your own will. You must decide to obey, love or submit, but all three actions are beyond your ability to carry out. You need God’s supernatural help to obey these directives, and that is why you must be in the Lord.

Paul identified children’s obedience as being right. It is possible to know what is right and wrong, but only if you submit to some standard outside your own ability to decide for yourself. That is important in light of modern tendencies to substitute sincerity for moral right. If you sincerely love someone and sleep with them before you are married, moderns don’t consider that wrong. God’s Word forbids fornication, so no matter how sincere a couple is, if they engage in sex before marriage, it is wrong or sinful behavior.

**6:2-3** – Notice that the command is to *honor* and not *obey* parents. It is important especially for adult children to make this distinction. You can honor your parents without obeying them, especially when obedience will cause trouble in your own home. I have seen manipulative, controlling parents who need to be honored but visited for no more than three days at a time once a year. Their presence has a toxic effect on their child’s marriage.

**Are you guilty of allowing your parental honor to interfere with your own marriage? If your parents act “crazy,” can you distinguish between honor, love and your duties to your spouse and children?** You may need to establish better and more distinct boundaries between you and your parents. This may cause tension but it will help your own family. Boundaries are the key. If your parents don’t respect those boundaries, then you may need to sever contact for a while to establish that you are serious.

My mother passed away a few years ago at the age of 92. I tried to call her every day, visit her once a week when I was in town, and planned social events with her on a regular basis. I honored her while she was alive as best I could. There is a blessing for doing that. While some children can’t break away from parents, of course some break away too far. You need to talk to your parents and visit them as often as possible.

## Study Six, Part Two

<sup>4</sup>Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. <sup>6</sup>Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

**6:4** – While my children were growing up, I prayed to remember what it was like to be young. I have seen parents establish unrealistic standards for their children, standards that they themselves as children could not and would not have kept. Fathers, listen to your children and remember what it was like when you were their age. When I say listen, I mean listen with the intent to understand and not to rebuke. Let them know that you are on their side, even if you have to discipline them. Don't yell and don't be shocked at what they may say or do. **What did you do when you were their age? Is what they did any worse?** If not, relax. If so, then deal with it patiently and determine what the Lord is trying to tell you.

**6:5** – Paul outlined a whole new world order for relationships in the second half of Ephesians. In this verse, he moved from family relationships to those of slaves and masters. The Apostle has been severely judged by some moderns for not condemning slavery. Recently I read this in *Christian History* magazine:

“Paul’s few words to masters in Ephesians undercut Aristotle’s whole basis for slavery (that Nature approved of it) and placed Paul among the most progressive ancient writers on the subject.” (Issue 47, Vol. XIV, No. 3).

Paul urged slaves to obey masters just as they would obey Christ. That kind of “heart” obedience can only come because you want it, but also must be produced by the Holy Spirit, for it is supernatural.

Whenever I read anything that pertains to “slaves” in the New Testament, I automatically substitute employees for slaves. By doing that I then have a Christian philosophy for workers to follow. You should therefore be obedient to your supervisors (not to do illegal things of course) and treat them with respect, honor and sincerity of heart. You should be distinguished from the other workers who are unbelievers, not participating in the evil, ungodly attitudes and behaviors in which they might indulge. **Are you the kind of employee who represents the Lord well? Where can you improve? Where is your attitude at work more worldly than godly?**

**6:6** – I have been both a “slave” and a “master” in business. I have always tried to take Paul’s instruction to slaves and apply it to employer and employee relationships. When I was working for someone, I tried to obey and win their favor so that I could be pleasing to God and not simply to “get in good” with the employer. And I tried to work the same way whether my supervisors were present or not. I pictured myself a slave for Christ.

If I was the master, I tried to remember what it was like to be where the employee was concerned and render decisions with grace and mercy. Yet that did not mean that I would be soft or a doormat for others to walk on. I expected and expect excellence in the workplace from myself and those who work with and for me. Anything less is unacceptable from a biblical point of view. **What kind of “master” are you in your place of employment?**

### Study Six, Part Three

<sup>7</sup>Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, <sup>8</sup>because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. <sup>9</sup>And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

**6:7** – If you work for men, your commitment to excellence will waver according to the way you are treated. If you work for Christ, you will almost always produce exemplary work because your focus isn’t on imperfect men and women but a perfect God. Verses five, six and seven each mention the heart in work matters. It is not a matter of intelligence that makes you a good worker, but rather the attitude of the heart (along with some measure of competence and skill).

To work with your heart, you must be doing something you love and something you were created to do. **Are you involved in purposeful work? Do you see how what you do honors God and contributes to a greater good? If not, how can you capture or recapture a sense of purpose in your work life?**

**6:8** – I have always worked like God was my employer. When I was a pastor, I would tell the people, “You didn’t hire me, you can’t fire me and you don’t pay me.” In my mind, God did all that. I have also come to see that God is not limited to reward your good work through your place of employment. He can send unexpected financial blessings from any number of sources. God and not your workplace meets your needs.

**Do you see that God can bless you financially in any number of ways, or have you limited God in your own mind in that regard? While you must work to eat, have you taken that to such an extreme that you have limited God to provide only through one means, when He is able to bless you in any number of exciting and surprising ways?**

**6:9** – After I learned to be a godly employee, I then had to learn how to be a godly employer. I had to learn to be the slave of Christ while serving others as their leader. I wasn’t permitted to threaten them or use coercive tactics because I was the “boss.” I too had a “boss” and His name is Jesus. Many companies treat their workers like slaves and use all manner of financial threats, spoken and unspoken, to control the workforce. This is wrong from a biblical point of view.

In Ephesians 6, Paul addressed the issue of husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. Paul spoke to real life issues with practical guidelines. Modern pastors, bishops and apostles should do the same. Doctrine is important, but what believers do with doctrine is just as important. Our Christian doctrine should empower us to be godly workers and exemplary supervisors. **Are you applying your faith to your daily life at work no matter where you work in your company? Perhaps you should ask those around you to assess whether or not your faith is evident in the work you do and the attitudes you have?**

### Study Six, Part Four

<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup>Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

**6:10** – Paul urged the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord. In Judges 14:6, we see that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson so that he was able to tear a lion apart with his bare hands. The account literally means that the Spirit clothed Himself with Samson, like as if He were putting Samson on as one would a coat or garment. That is what I think of when I think of being strong in the Lord. God uses me as He created me to be and I obtain significant results because He is working in and through me according to His good pleasure. **Is God your strength? When is that strength most evident?**

I love you, O Lord, my **strength** (Psalm 18:1).

It is God who arms me with **strength** and makes my way perfect (Psalm 18:32).

You armed me with **strength** for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet (Psalm 18:39).

O Lord, the king rejoices in your **strength**. How great is his joy in the victories you give! (Psalm 21:1).

The Lord is my **strength** and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song (Psalm 28:7).

**6:11** – The believer needs the full armor to stand against the devil's schemes. The devil is intelligent. I sometimes hear believers mocking and belittling the devil. That is something I have never done. I have a healthy respect for my enemy and always keep my focus on God and never on the devil. The devil is always planning and scheming and I need everything that God has for me if I am to resist his entrapments.

**6:12** – I must constantly be reminded that my warfare is not with flesh and blood. For example, Muslims are not my enemies, but the antichrist spirit of Islam is indeed my enemy. **Have you made flesh and blood your focus?** You need to look past the human to the spiritual cause that lies behind.

**6:13** – Paul wrote “when” the day of evil comes, not “if” the day of evil comes. There are some who underestimate the level of warfare once they put their faith in Christ. Jesus said to Peter:

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

Some have mistakenly assumed that since the gates of hell will not prevail or overcome the Church that the gates of hell will not *try* to prevail. That is incorrect. When you became a Christian, you are a marked person, an enemy of the kingdom of darkness. You may not want to fight, but you will have no choice.

Paul wanted the Ephesians to stand their ground. Ours is not always an offensive warfare. We saw earlier that we have all things in Christ (see Ephesians 1:3); the enemy will try to take away what we already have. You must take a stand and resist him as one of David’s might men did in 2 Samuel 23 and as Paul urged the Corinthians to do:

Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory (2 Samuel 23:11-12).

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

Some have noted that there is no armor of God for the back, only for the front. We must face our enemies and not turn our backs to run or flee. **Are you standing firm or running right now in your life?**

### Study Six, Part Five

<sup>14</sup>Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup>and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup>Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

**6:14&15** – The first three pieces of God’s armor are truth, righteousness and shoes. Those three things form a partnership that should not be broken. We need correct doctrine and understanding, holiness and purity, and action and deeds. Think of them also as three legs on a stool; if any one leg is broken, the stool cannot stand. If you emphasize any one over the other two, you are not in balance.

You are to be aggressive in “walking,” taking the gospel of peace to other places. But note that it is a gospel of peace, not of wrangling and condemnation. That is why I travel so much to foreign lands. I want to take my truth in the context of righteousness and walk it out to bring others peace. **What are you doing to “walk out” your truth and holiness? Is it time for you to take a missions trip? Is it time to do something with your doctrine and holiness?**

**6:16** – As you go forth in God to do His will, you will be attacked by flaming arrows. These arrows do some damage when they land, but if they aren’t dislodged or extinguished, they will bring even greater damage. Take note that it is faith that will extinguish the devil’s arrows.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

**What is your faith level right now – high or low?** I’m not talking about doctrinal faith. I’m talking about everyday faith that is reflected in your living and giving. **What are you trusting God for right now that if He doesn’t come through, you are in trouble?**

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:14-17).

**6:17** – Salvation and the word of God are important parts of your spiritual protection. The helmet is fixed in place. It is hard to knock off your head but you can easily remove it. The sword is both defensive and offensive, however, and the Word is flexible to be used in many different ways. Don’t use the sword of God’s word on other people, however. Use it to defeat the devil and bring victory to your own life.

### Study Six, Part Six

<sup>18</sup>And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. <sup>19</sup>Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

**6:18** – Paul wanted the Ephesians to pray “in the Spirit.” I try to be Spirit-led when I pray, even though I usually pray using a written or mental list of petitions. If you are going to pray Spirit-led prayers, you will need to spend some time being sensitive or “listening” for the Spirit’s prayer agenda for you. Some of what we do as prayer warriors is to provide a prayer covering for our fellow believers.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27).

**6:19&20** – Paul was in prison as he wrote, but he wanted the church to pray that he would continue to fulfill his purpose of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was always looking for ways to fulfill what he was created to do, even when circumstances put him in a difficult place. **How committed to your life purpose are you? Do you know your purpose?**

Paul was an “ambassador in chains.” No matter what situation he was in, he was an ambassador. He didn’t take a break (or try to make a break) because he was in jail. I would think that Paul was under house arrest as he wrote this letter, for conditions in normal Roman jails would not have conducive to writing. The fact is that his freedom and mobility were limited (and this for a man who was constantly on the go), yet he was still looking for ways to do what he was created to do.

**Are you encountering limitations in your ability to do what is in your heart to do for the Lord?** Then pray and ask God for insight into how you can creatively implement and carry out your goals and objectives. Maybe it’s time to write, publish, delegate, or solidify as you look at your current situation.

### Study Six, Part Seven

<sup>21</sup>Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. <sup>22</sup>I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. <sup>23</sup>Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

**6:21** – Paul or one of his team obviously tried to visit the churches on a regular basis. There are many apostolic networks and denominations in place today, but too often they exist not for the benefit of the churches they serve, but for the benefit of the main leaders or the centralized bureaucracy. I also find many apostolic overseers also pastor a church. That dilutes their ability to oversee the churches. They should make a decision to do one or the other – pastor or oversee.

**6:22** – Paul sent Tychicus to encourage the church. There was obviously a strong relational tie between the saints in Ephesus and Paul. Relationship is another aspect of apostolic leadership that I find is often missing. Too often the “apostles” or bishops come to town and speak from the pulpit, collect an offering, spend some time with the main leader and go home. There is no relationship established with the people.

I am not sure you can assess the health of a church from the pulpit alone or from speaking to the leader or leaders. The apostles and bishops need to be more in touch with the grassroots of the organization and not just the pastor. That involves taking time to listen to the leadership and the people to hear their concerns and challenges.

It is interesting that Paul was sending someone to encourage *them*. He was the one in jail and would seem to be the one that needed the encouragement. I worked for a leader once who would always “bleed” on the people, telling them how discouraged he was and working up sympathy for his condition. This is not what Paul did. He was looking for a way to encourage them even though he was in jail. That is true leadership!

**6:23& 24** – Paul blessed them as he closed with a prayer for peace, love with faith and grace. Those are what every church leader should try to bring to any work they have established or oversee. I want to be a channel of blessing for those with whom I work in the Church. My objective is to bring peace, love and grace.

“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!" (Isaiah 52:7).

Notice that Paul mentioned Jesus twice as he closed the letter. I mentioned it before in this study, but I will write it again: Church work is all about Jesus, about *His* will for *His* people. Paul didn't end the letter talking about himself, his ministry or his achievements. He ended it directing their attention to Jesus. It's all about Him!

As we end this Ephesians study, I trust that you will realize too that it's all about Jesus. Whether you are a husband, wife, student, worker, employer, church leader or young person still maturing, your focus should always be Him. Your behavior should be pleasing to Him, not to try and gain His favor but because you already have His favor. You are seated with Him in heavenly places and have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing.

I trust that you will take the great truths in this epistle and creatively apply them to your life situation, whether you are a king or an inmate, a bishop or a young child at home with your parent(s)! May the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus be with you and yours as you seek to walk out your salvation on a daily basis. God bless you!