Ephesians 6 Summary

Standing Around Praying

# Introduction

As we close Ephesians out we find Paul has taken us on a series of lessons about who God is; who Christ is; who the Holy Spirit is; who we are as individuals and as a body in Christ; and how these areas intersect. Paul started us in God’s riches and identification; carried us into the rich newness of the church – which removes division between Jews and Gentiles; He prayed for the church that we would see the multi-dimensional love of Christ together; He took on unity in the Spirit through God, grace, and the equipping of the saints; He implored us to be imitators of God that we might be a light to the world and an encouragement to one another; in submission to one another he lifted us up to the heights of the heavenly marriage between Christ and the church (that is to come); And as we studied in Ephesians 6 we saw that submission and unity re-iterated within our homes, godly servitude, and through standing together in the tortoise formation, equipped through the identification truths and prayer for one another.

# Submission in More Contexts

Chapter 6 continues with Paul’s various examples of submission, having started with the broad statement of submitting to one another in 5:21 and then appropriating it within the scope of marriage from 5:22-33. As chapter six begins we see the application tied to parenting and then into the scope of slavery.

*What does submission represent within the body?*

Submission was reflection of the humility of the believer believing what was true of them in Christ throughout the letter of Ephesians (and other New Testament revelation) as well as what was true of the other believers. This idea that the spiritual growth of the individual impacted their interactions with other believers and brought about unity through a godly perspective was extremely counter culture. Within Israel there was the desire to be extra pious and lean on all the things that Paul counted as loss (Philippians 3:2-11), and within the Greco-Roman culture the desire to be seen as elevated and highly honored was core to social interactions. Throughout Ephesians 5:22-6:9 we see submission as a radical, but critical concept. In Philippians 2:3 Paul wrote to the believers there, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;” This is a radical concept that is worthy of collective consideration.

## Submission in Parenting

Paul’s admonishment that we see submission in parenting comes with two parts, not three. For whatever reason mothers are not urged towards a form of submission in this passaged. However, if wives are submitting to their husbands from the previous passage and husbands are not exasperating their children, then we can imagine mothers shouldn’t be either.

### Submission from Children (6:1-3)

In Mark 7:9-13 Jesus calls out the religious zealots for setting aside the Law. The children would use the Law against the Law and thus allow the children to come out from under the leadership of their parents! Paul’s recommendation is that the children consider their believing parents as those whom they should respect and submit to. His reference to the Old Testament Law is not a recommendation that we submit to the Law, but that we consider that even within the Law there was a benefit to the submission.

#### Obedience

*What is obedience?*

The Greek word translated to obedience here comes from the compound word literally translated to “listen under,” but the translation ‘obey’ is good. The idea is that you hear a command and then do it because you have listened under someone. Obedience is not necessarily about control, but about relationship, roles and understanding. As Christ illustrated in Matthew 7:7-11, the heavenly Father has the authority to do whatever He pleases, but His character is one of care and provision. Similarly, the obedience of the children is not given in light of mere compliance, but rooted in care (more on this in verse 4).

#### Obedience in the Lord

*Why would Paul specify this with a condition of believing parents?*

Paul knows that not all of his readers are in 100% Christian households. This is a big deal when we consider the idea of what Paul is advocating: obedience. What sort of things would a pagan parent be supporting or instructing their children to? The answer could obviously not line up with biblical instructions for the believer. Paul adds this qualifier to his instruction so that believers would not see obedience as a higher priority than their faith.

This is contextual as we see in other relationships like husband and wife from 1 Peter 3:1-7 where the godliness of the wife draws the husband to want to know more about the Lord and respond to the gospel. While not explicitly stated here the larger manifestation of the life of Christ to the World should at least draw attention to the impact of the gospel on our own lives and potentially reach the lost as they seek to understand the source of our life.

### Fathers Worth Submitting To (6:4)

Fathers, while feeling they have authority and submission should be expected behavior, need to be leading their families with a stewardship towards godly children.

#### Provoking Children to Anger

While permissible in Ephesus [and Roman law] for parents to treat their children poorly, Paul specifically wants parents to not be parenting in a way that will cause their children to be angry.

#### Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord

##### Discipline

The word translated ‘discipline’ here is actually a word used to describe the whole training and education of children with the intend to cultivate thinking, morality, and training to curb immaturity and emotional behavior. When we see Hebrews 12:3-11’s description of our Heavenly Father we find that His discipline is for a purpose of growth and maturity. It yields fruit and the purpose is, in part, to let us show off His holiness as we represent Him on this earth. Discipline rooted in love is not something that leads to revolting, anger or animocity, but instead it leads to maturity.

##### Instruction

While not specifically quoting the Old Testament the same principles applied for New Testament fathers: teach your children about what God has revealed and teach them about biblical truth. We might use the term discipleship here. This looks like what was directed in chapter 4 within the body for growth, but inside the household. The complement of this is seen in Paul’s instruction to Timothy (c.f. 1 Timothy 3:1-7, specifically 4-5) about elders: their children and household should reflect this sort of practice.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:11 he compares the actions of himself and his co-teachers as being like fathers who encourage and implore. As people, in our conditional context, our earthly fathers often color our perspective of our Heavenly Father.

## Submission in Slavery

The social institution of slavery existed before New Testament times and appears to show up in pagan cultures like Sumer first. Paul and other New Testament authors urged a biblical attitude about serving Christ rather than serving masters out of fleshly motivation [c.f. 1 Peter 2:18-25]. Elsewhere Paul wrote for the liberation of slaves whenever possible. One form of bondage called ‘debt slavery’ was often tied to the idea that someone owed someone else money or other resources and when it could not be paid they became slaves, but the owner did not intend to let the debt be considered paid. In modern contexts this would be like pay day loans with 100% interest. Paul speaks against this idea of staying in bondage [c.f. 1 Corinthians 7:21], and even appeals for Onesimus in his letter to Philemon [c.f. the whole letter].

Since various legally acceptable practices were going on Paul wants believers to be walking out a Christ-like attitude of service. This isn’t a recommendation for slavery, but a recommendation for godliness despite circumstances.

# Standing Together, In Christ

Paul teaches the Ephesians about their need to stand together in identification with Christ – who would have been used to seeing the Roman soldiers around their city – through analogy. It’s easy to get caught up in the extrapolations of the analogy, but the focus is actually on the two other elements: standing together and abiding in Christ.

## Standing Together

Paul’s direction for the believers here is one of defense and maintaining ground. The tortoise formation (Testudo Formation) would have been a highly protective formation for standing together. Paul further reinforces this idea of standing together with being able to resisting together.

Just as the earlier direction from Paul indicated needing to be intimate within the body through no division between Jews and Gentiles [c.f. Ephesians 2:11-3:10], knowing love together [c.f. Ephesians 3:17-19]; as well as being united and formed together [c.f. 4:1-16]; walking together in Christ’s righteousness through the Spirit [c.f. 4:17-5:21]; then being submissive to one another [5:21-6:9]; the idea of being united together to stand is a call for being a unit, fit together, working together to be standing, resisting, and reminding each other of who we are in Christ.

## The Godhead in the Armor

The armor itself carries with it the persons and work of the godhead. Firstly, the armor is of God [vs. 11,13]. It’s not man’s armor, it’s not just spiritual armor, but God’s armor. Then, as Paul describes the armor it comes in words that describe relationship with God.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Verse*** | ***Person/Work of God*** | ***Piece of Armor*** |
| **6:14** | God’s Truth – Truth gets its definition in God; He is its author. Satan’s primary attack is through deception. God’s truth is always the defense. | Pteruges – a leather skirt with metal studs in it to protect the thighs and loin |
| **6:14** | God’s righteousness. As we abide we manifest God’s righteousness in our lives. When we walk in the righteousness of God no attack is based in reality, but false accusations. Not rooted in legalism this armor’s flexibility is similar in our liberty: we walk in righteous liberty. | Lorica segmentata - Breastplate made of segments that allowed for maximum protection and flexibility to keep soldiers protected, but responsive under attack. |
| **6:15** | The Gospel of Peace – when being attacked with deception the reality of who we are in Christ due to Christ’s work on the cross is truly the only source of peace. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit orchestrated our identification so that we can stand in what is true of us in Christ. | Caligae – Spiked sandals – similar to today’s cleats, but with large nails sticking out of the bottom. Useful for standing. |
| **6:16** | Shield of Faith in God – Our salvation is by grace through faith [c.f. Ephesians 2:8], and our faith is in Christ. When deception comes our faith is in the facts, the truth is our foundation. | Scutum – A tall shield to protect most of the body. It was generally covered in leather to stop fiery arrows, and its hard edges could be swung in self defense and to impact attackers. |
| **6:17** | The Helmet of Salvation – God saved us, including our minds, and is renewing them [Romans 12:2], through the process of our salvation being worked out in our daily lives. | Galea – a helmet that by the time of Paul’s writing would have covered the neck, had some protection for the ears, and the sides of the face. |
| **6:17** | The Sword of the Spirit – In contrast to the outcome of principle or position, the Holy Spirit, as God, indwells the believer and is able to act on our behalf. His strength is our strength, and He has authority over the devil. | Gladius – The primary sword of foot soldiers was about 27-30 inches long, and was shorter than the cavalry’s sword. This had a long, pointed, end. |

God’s work throughout the life of the believer is not only something we grow in, but something that is part of His preparing us for standing.

### Praying

#### Prayer Warriors

Paul’s call to pray covers not only his ministry, but also the broader church – for all saints. Throughout the Bible there’s an additional element of prayer: when we seek for God to intervene we don’t confront the enemy directly, we let God take the offense. This keeps us standing, trusting, and waiting, not seeking out direct confrontation with the devil.

# The Sign Off

Paul signs off with specification about further personal details (the non-inspired bits) coming from Tychicus. He focuses in on wanting to comfort the church in Ephesus as they are concerned for Paul’s wellbeing. Peace and grace come together in the traditional gentile greeting (Charis was the Roman Aloha), but with the twist that Paul had redefined Grace to be much larger than the hopeful blessing of the pagan gods, but the actual blessing from God [c.f. Ephesians 1:3].

# Conclusion

The schemes of the devil are often ripples carried through mankind’s blindness to God. In Job he has to ask God for permission to act at all, but if he can ask one question and billions of people transmit that deception rather than seek God’s truth together, being united together in Christ, then the impact can be strong and require no direct interactions. As we stand as believers around the world we are to be standing in truth, teaching in truth, loving in truth, and interacting in God’s ways by the power of the Holy Spirit.