

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR NOVEMBER 7

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

THE BACKGROUND

The Book of Ephesians has two distinctive parts. The first part (Eph. 1-3) is doctrinal. Its many theological themes include God's rich blessings, God's power in Christ, believers' unity in Christ, and God's powerful and gracious salvation that delivers believers from death to new life in Christ. Doctrine is bound tightly to duty. Knowing the truth in one's mind is not enough; truth must be put into practice in one's daily life. Consequently, chapters 4-6 of Ephesians focus on application.

In these latter three chapters of Ephesians, Paul used the term "walk" six times to refer to believers' duties that result from Christian doctrines. In these six occurrences, "walk" is a metaphor for living the Christian life. In Ephesians 4:1 believers are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling they have received in Christ. The believers' daily walk was to conform to their relationship with Christ rather than to their former pagan lifestyles. In 5:2 Paul directed the believers to walk in love. In 5:8 believers were instructed to walk in light. Finally, in 5:15, Paul told the Ephesian Christians to walk in wisdom, and then the apostle spelled out specifically how they could walk in God's wisdom regarding their relationships with the Lord and with others.

1. BE WISE WITH YOUR TIME (EPHESIANS 5:15-16)

Verses 15-16: *Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil.*

Paul used the word "walk" to refer to Christian living. If Christians should not "participate in the fruitless works of darkness" (5:11), how then should they live? In verses 15-16 Paul began to answer this question for the believers at Ephesus.

Paul wrote that they needed to pay careful attention to how they walked. In the original language the form of the verb translated "pay attention" suggests that the apostle wanted the believers to make a habit of living carefully. The Greek word translated "pay attention" also means "to give heed," and the word translated "careful" also means "accurately" or "diligently." This latter word occurs fewer than 6 times in the New Testament. One occurrence appears in Luke 1:3 where

Luke wrote that he had "carefully investigated" the history of Jesus' life and ministry — from those events surrounding His birth in Bethlehem to His ascension into heaven. Obviously, Luke was not present at all the events of Jesus' life. The Gospel writer knew for sure, however, that all he wrote in the Gospel of Luke was accurate because, under the Spirit's inspiration, he had attended carefully to each and every detail. In similar fashion, Paul exhorted the Ephesians to give their walk with Christ their utmost attention.

Scripture provides many clear instances of people who did not give first place to the Lord, such as the Israelites who became devotees of Baal, a false god (1 Kings 18:20-21). Or the church at Laodicea where believers cared more for riches than for Christ (Rev. 3:14-21). Listen again to Paul's spear-pointed directive: Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk. Give how you walk center-stage attention in your life.

Paul next stated what he did and did not have in mind regarding how the Ephesians were to walk. They should not walk as unwise people but as wise. The term "unwise" refers to those who know little or nothing of God's purposes for them, or if they know, they don't eagerly accept them. Wise people know God's will and passionately follow it, just as their Lord did (John 17:4).

The New Testament has various words to refer to time. The one used here does not refer to chronology or to the space of time we have each day. Rather, "time" in this verse designates a moment especially favorable or significant that may be lost if not seized right then. It is time in the sense of a God-given opportunity. Jesus used this word for time in reference to His death when He told His disciples, "My time is near" (Matt. 26:18). Felix the procurator also used this term when he responded to Paul's witness concerning Jesus with the request, "Leave for now, but when I find time I'll call for you" (Acts 24:25).

Paul wanted the Ephesians to be so wise they did not let any day's opportunities to glorify God through service, worship, trust, and obedience slip away. Thus the point: Wise believers snap up or take advantage of opportunities to use their time in Christ's service.

Paul next provided a reason for making the most of opportunities at hand: Because the days are evil. Wickedness abounds. Satan relentlessly opposes God's work in the world. The Devil watches for opportunities to hinder God's purposes. Even so, believers must not fear evil days. God's people must not waste opportunities to

advance His holy and gracious purposes because they fear potentially dangerous consequences. Living wisely by using opportunities to please God isn't easy; it never has been.

2. BE AWARE OF GOD'S WILL (EPHESIANS 5:17)

Verse 17: *So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*

If the Ephesians were to be wise, they must know God's will, which is perfect wisdom. The word "so" can also be rendered "on account of this." Paul drew a conclusion from what he had just written in verses 15-16. His first conclusion was don't be foolish. The term "foolish" in this context refers to a lack of understanding and discernment in applying knowledge in a practical way. The most practical and necessary thing believers needed to understand was the Lord's will. Paul's verb tense commanded believers not to become foolish and continue in a state of foolishness, which was a real possibility. Instead, they were to live wisely by making the most of opportunities. Evil times can entice believers to act foolishly if they are not walking carefully in wisdom.

After this negative instruction, Paul presented the positive side — "but understand what the Lord's will is." Paul wanted the Ephesians to move beyond mere head knowledge — facts stored in their minds — to comprehending how the Lord's teachings were to impact their actions. If the Ephesians understood and did the Lord's will, they would not live as they had before Christ saved them. Rather, their lives would reflect Christ's lifestyle.

In summary, Paul wanted believers to understand and do the Lord's will in their daily walk with Him. Wisdom demanded they make that kind of lifestyle their highest priority. Paul's words apply to us as well. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39).

A basic way believers learn God's will for their lives is by reading God's Word. The Bible "is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Bible scholars refer to God's will revealed in the Scriptures as His general will. It relates to all believers. What God's Word teaches is the same for all of us. In Ephesians 5:17, however, Paul most likely was referring to God's particular or specific will for believers in certain situations and at certain times. The apostle wanted the

Ephesian believers to perceive what God was doing in their city, in their church family, in their own families, and in each of their lives, then act in accordance with that understanding of His will. Believers won't find specific Scriptural information like the career God wants them to pursue or the name of the individual He wants them to marry. Believers can, however, understand what the Lord's will is in such important matters.

3. BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (EPHESIANS 5:18-20)

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a third way to demonstrate being careful in how you live. What did Paul mean by his teaching regarding the Holy Spirit's fullness?

Verse 18: *And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled with the Spirit:*

Paul stated a negative comparison between the Holy Spirit's fullness and drunkenness. The Ephesians were not to get drunk with wine. Clearly, the apostle prohibited drunkenness, as the Bible does in other texts as well (Prov. 23:19-21, 29-33; Isa. 5:11; 28:7-8; 1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:3). Exhilaration through the excessive use of wine is not a practice in which Christians are to indulge. Intoxication leads only to reckless actions. Paul commanded the Ephesians to avoid such foolish conduct. Intoxicated people, having lost control of their actions, act foolishly, and Paul had just written, "Don't be foolish" (Eph. 5:17).

Instead of being full of wine, believers were to be filled with the Spirit of God. They were to live under the Spirit's control not under wine's control. The Greek word translated "be filled" is a command that means "keep on letting the Spirit fill you." This understanding is consistent with the view expressed concerning "the fullness of God" in 3:19. The verb form "be filled" is also plural. Thus the command to be filled with the Spirit is for all believers, not just for a special few.

Being filled with the Spirit is not the same as being "baptized by one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13), which is the Spirit's work of uniting believers to Christ when they first trust in Him. Being filled with the Spirit is not being sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), which is an act of ownership and security. Being filled with the Spirit is not just experiencing the indwelling of the Spirit (John 14:16-17), which refers to His presence in believers' lives. Also, being filled with the Spirit is not His gifting believers (1 Cor. 12:1-11), which refers to the Spirit's empowering them to live for Christ in special ways. The Spirit's fullness distinctly empowers believers to please their Lord.

Verse 19: *speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music to the Lord in your heart,*

Paul pointed out four results of the Spirit's filling in Ephesians 5:19-20. Wine's control produces "reckless actions" (5:18); the Spirit's control produces actions that are in ongoing repetition.

In specifying these four results of the Spirit's filling, nothing is reported about miracles, ecstatic speech, unearthly visions, or trances. The first reported result of the Spirit's fullness is speaking to one another. The phrase refers to communication with other believers. The means of communication mentioned are psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. These terms are difficult to distinguish clearly. Paul likely had in mind songs of praise that overflowed from believers' hearts. The effect of the Spirit's filling the Ephesians was singing. The picture is one of joyful fellowship among believers as they met together and sang together. Joy, music, singing, praise — how these results contrast to the folly of drunkenness that brings loss, hurt, and regret!

The phrase "singing and making music" describes the second and third results of the Spirit's filling, but here the two actions are directed to the Lord, rather than to one another. The main point in singing and making music is to verbalize praise to Christ that comes from the heart, not from the ego. Both corporate and individual worship involves singing praises.

The singing of Spirit-filled believers, whether solo, in a choir, or by the congregation, is to be directed to the Lord for His pleasure. Church music is not for entertainment or for showing off one's musical talent. The Lord Jesus is the focus of all who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 20: *giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

The fourth result of the Spirit's fullness in believers' lives in this passage is giving thanks. Spirit-filled believers are full of thanksgiving, rather than complaints and grumbling. To give thanks is to gratefully acknowledge the benefits one receives.

In giving thanks believers recognize that they cannot take credit for blessings, that they are unworthy recipients, and that their benefits are bountiful. Believers who are Spirit-filled maintain an attitude of gratitude. Thanksgiving helps put worries on the run, stops grumbling, inspires courage to face tomorrows, brings peace to the soul, and glorifies God.

For what are believers to thank God? Paul said Spirit-filled Christians thank Him for everything. God does not want His people to give Him thanks for murders, adulteries, rapes, lies, thefts, addictions to pornographic magazines or movies, kidnappings, or any other sins. Christ died to cleanse us and to empower us to avoid committing these and other sins by filling us with His Spirit.

Does "everything" include disease, depression, natural disasters, and other such experiences that break our hearts? Knowing God's presence with His people, His power, and His merciful love for believers, such experiences are mysteries to us. In these calamities we must give room for trust to grow, trust that looks to God and says, "I don't have an answer. I'm certain You do, and that's enough for me." Even in losses that may rip our hearts apart, believers can find many reasons to give thanks to God, and Christ's comforting presence is a most significant reason. In Romans 8:28 Paul reminded us that God works for good in all things for His people. Many things that happen in our world are not good, but God can use even life's most difficult experiences to accomplish His purpose in His people's lives.

To whom are Christians to give thanks? Paul's answer is to God the Father. God is a Father to believers, not just Creator and Governor of the universe. As Father, He has an intimate, personal relationship with His children. Finally, how are believers to express gratitude? Paul taught that we are to express thanksgiving from our hearts to the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father worked through His Son to give us the greatest blessing of all — salvation from our sins.

Paul urged Christians to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit and indicated the use of psalms, music, and thanksgiving as evidence of such filling. We are being careful in how we live when we continually allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and guide us in what we do.

4. BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER (EPHESIANS 5:21)

Ephesians 5:21 can be understood as another evidence or result of the filling of the Holy Spirit. This lesson, however — like many translations and commentaries — interprets it as a separate emphasis.

In the Book of Ephesians, Paul described God's new humanity, the body of Christ. Those who belong in this body are completely one in Christ even though they are people of all cultures and races, including Jews and Gentiles. This

body God is creating through Christ has no walls separating its members based on sex, rank, class, culture, or age. In this body, members have equal acceptance, differing roles, and similar attitudes of submission to one another.

Verse 21: *submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.*

Submission is not a popular word in modern society. Preferred words are freedom, individualism, and permissiveness. The modern mood is libertarian, so Paul's statement "submitting to one another" doesn't fit well with today's thinking.

It is important to understand that submission — deferring to another's preferences or yielding to another's will, does not mean inferiority. Jesus, the Son of God, showed great humility. Regarding Himself, Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29). Taking the servant's role, Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:5). Paul elsewhere wrote of Jesus, "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). The idea of submissiveness is also expressed in Romans 12:10 where Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, "Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor." And in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves." Paul had seen the problems pride, egotism, and bloated self-importance caused among God's people. He knew firsthand what a lack of humility did among believers at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11-12; 3:1-9; 11:17-22). How destructive is spiritual superiority among God's people! How healing is a spirit of submissiveness!

Submission must occur, Paul also wrote, in the fear of Christ because He is the Master and Lord of all. He who submitted Himself to the Father by dying on the cross for our salvation is our greatest example. He is more than an example, however. He is our Lord. Thus the only reverent response is to yield to His will and to follow His example.

What does the filling of the Spirit sound like? It sounds like music and singing and giving thanks. What does the filling of the Spirit look like? Following the example the Son of God who humbled Himself for us, it looks like humility toward other believers.

Paul urged Christians to submit themselves to one another. We are being careful in how we live when we give preference to others' desires and needs over those of our own.

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR NOVEMBER 14 EPHESIANS 5:22-33

THE BACKGROUND

Paul admonished the Ephesian Christians to walk wisely by making the most of every opportunity to do God's will because they lived in evil times (Eph. 5:15-17). They could live in such manner only by the enabling power of the Spirit (5:18). Paul next described five characteristics of being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:19-21. These qualities are to define Christian behavior at church and at home. The first four relate more to the church setting and the fifth more to the home setting. Ephesians 5:21 concludes the section begun in 5:15 and also is a hinge verse to Ephesians 5:22-33.

Believers whose lives are filled with the Spirit live in ways that are pleasing to God wherever they are, not only at church but also at the workplace. The Spirit-filled life, however, cannot be measured merely by believers' private moments with God or by their public conduct with other believers. The Spirit's fullness also needs to be manifested in the privacy of one's home where relationships are close and continual. In believers' homes the outward indication of the Spirit's fullness is "submitting to one another in the fear of Christ" (5:21). Paul began first with the wives' submission to their husbands as certain evidence of the Spirit's fullness at work in their lives.

1. FOR WIVES (EPHESIANS 5:22-24)

Verse 22: *Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord,*

Christian wives demonstrate they are Spirit-filled by submitting to their husbands. Probably no statement in the Letter to the Ephesians has sparked more controversy and discussion than this statement. In our world today the notion of submission is not fashionable. Permissiveness and libertarianism are in. A submissive attitude is out of sync with the modern mood.

Some incorrectly argue that Paul wrote Ephesians 5:22 out of male arrogance. They say the apostle assumed males are intrinsically superior to females and therefore females are inferior to males. However, because a person has a subordi-

nate position does not necessarily imply inferiority. Jesus is not inferior to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is not inferior to the Father or the Son.

Another objection to Paul's statement is raised by those who view it as contradicting his point in the Letter to the Galatians: In Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). However, Paul was not obliterating the distinction between the sexes in that verse. Rather, the apostle meant that faith alone, not gender, is the great leveler regarding personal salvation. In Christ all believers equally share in the wonderful riches of His salvation.

What then did Paul mean when he instructed Christian married women to submit to their husbands? The verb "submit" could best be understood as meaning Christian wives choose to submit as free agents before God (see Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1). For the family's unity and order, leadership must be established. God has given that responsibility to the Christian husband and father. Because much of the care of rearing children rests with the mother, God has graciously not overburdened her. He has placed the ultimate responsibility on the husband's shoulders, not hers. The husband's role, however, does not mean the wife has an inferior role in the home. Superiority and inferiority are not the issues; responsibility is. Servility is not the issue. Submission does not mean the wife is to accept without question everything the husband says and does. The wife's willing functioning under her husband's responsible leadership is the issue. The ultimate responsibility for the household rests on the husband's shoulders, not on the wife's shoulders.

Paul also taught that the wife should submit to her husband as to the Lord. This concept also occurs in Ephesians 6:7 and Colossians 3:23. In each reference the designation "the Lord" refers to Christ. As the Christian wife submits to her husband, she also submits to her Lord as part of her personal obedience to Him.

Verses 23-24: *for the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Now as the church submits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

Headship implies authority. A home without direction is as chaotic as a nation without a ruler or an army without a commander. According to the Scriptures, the husband's task is being the wife's head and thus the family's head, just as Christ has authority over His church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15). Paul further stressed this point in 5:24: "Now as the church sub-

mits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands."

What should the husband's headship look like day by day? Paul's answer is that the husband's role should look like Christ's role to His church. He is the Savior of the body. The word "body" refers to the church, God's family of believers. Christ rescued His church from eternal separation from the Father. In a similar way, the husband is the protector of his family. He protects his wife and children from danger. The husband, of course, does not save his wife from eternal judgment (as Christ does the church) but acts as protector in a temporal sense. Christ as Savior of the church, therefore, exemplifies that the husband's position of authority encompasses a protective role.

Husbands, take note. Your authority is to be selfless. You are to protect, provide for, and care for your wife and children. Your authority is not so much as lord as it is as protector and provider. You are not to be a tyrant, barking out orders. If you think tyranny defines your role, you are far, far off base. Your headship is to mirror the headship of Christ who sacrificed Himself on the cross. Being vitally interested in your wife's welfare, you are to use your authority to provide, to protect, and to care for the woman you love.

Wives, take note. The church's submission to Christ is your model. That submission is wholehearted, sincere, and voluntary. If the outcome of your husband's leadership is your favor, as Christ's always is to His church, why wouldn't you follow his leadership?

2. FOR HUSBANDS (EPHESIANS 5:25-30)

One word characterizes the wife's duty — submission. Similarly, one word characterizes the husband's duty — love. The amount of space Paul gave to the husband — twice as many verses — indicates the importance of husbands' responsibility to their wives. Paul knew that husbands' fulfilling their responsibilities enriches their wives and promotes harmony in the marital relationship.

Verses 25-27: *Husbands, love your wives, just as also Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her in the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless.*

Christ Himself is the supreme example to husbands of this special love. The analogy between Christ and husbands used in this section dealing with instructions to husbands is not headship; it is love alone. Thus Paul's command to

Christian husbands in this verse is not “be the head” but “be loving.” A husband is to love his wife to the degree that he is willing to sacrifice himself for her well-being.

Paul pointed out three purposes or goals of Christ’s death on the cross. The first purpose was to make her holy, in other words, to sanctify the church. Sanctification refers to consecration to God or to God’s service. Just as individual believers in Christ are set apart for Him, so also is Christ’s church.

The second purpose of Christ’s death was to present the church to Himself in splendor. Christ set apart the church through the giving of Himself in death for the further purpose of bringing to Himself the church robed in splendor.

The third purpose of Christ’s death on the cross was that His church might be holy and blameless. The church of the living Christ will have moral perfection. Being holy, the church will be separated unto Him. Being blameless, the church will have no moral defects (see 2 Cor. 11:2).

Verses 28-30: *In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh, but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, since we are members of His body.*

Paul emphasized the love husbands are to demonstrate toward their wives with the additional comment “as their own bodies.” A man takes care of his body. He protects it and nourishes it with food, water, rest, and sleep. His personal consideration must extend beyond himself to his wife. The phrase “as their own bodies” clearly does not mean love for one’s wife is to be love for selfish advantage.

Look at all Christ has done for His body. He redeemed the church (Eph. 1:7); sealed it (1:13); empowered it (1:19-23); made it one body (2:16); gave it diverse gifts (4:7-11); and loved, cleansed, and sanctified it (5:25-26). Clearly the Lord is not only the Lord of His church, He also provides and cares for it. Husbands, your role is to follow His example in your caring role.

3. FOR BOTH (EPHESIANS 5:31-33)

Verse 31: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*

When a man marries a woman, they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Adam said of Eve that she was bone of his bone (2:23) because God took one of Adam’s ribs and from it made a woman. Thus from the creation, God intended for a

husband to love his wife because she is his very flesh, just as the church is Christ’s body for which He loves and cares. Marriage models the church’s union with the living Christ. Incidentally, the husband is joined to his wife, not to another man’s wife and not to another man.

Verse 32: *This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

What is the profound mystery? The husband’s role as head of his wife (5:23) and his duty to give sacrificial love and devoted care to this wife are pictures of Christ as Head of His church and of His loving self-sacrifice on the cross for the church. Furthermore, the wife’s submission to her husband as a way of serving Christ is a picture of how the church is to live in its relationship to the One who is its Savior.

Verse 33: *To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.*

In this conclusion Paul directed his words first to the husband and then to the wife. The phrase “each one of you” individualizes the instruction. No married person is exempt from responsibility regarding marital roles.

Each husband is to love his wife as himself. The word translated “love” is a command in the present tense. It is the term for unconditional love that always seeks the other’s highest good. Each husband is to show continuous, unselfish love to his own wife. The husband is to keep on and on loving his wife in the same way as Christ loves His church. Each wife is to respect her husband in his role as head of the home.

Paul called for husbands and wives to relate to one another in ways that illustrate the relationship of Christ and the church. The expression of unity in a marriage goes far beyond sexual union and includes every area of a couple’s life and relationship. Husbands and wives are to express a unity that is complete in every way.

The Christian home is a sacred institution. It reflects the relationship of the living Christ with His people. Husbands and wives, conduct yourselves according to Paul’s teachings. Relate to your spouses on the basis of your own relationship with Jesus. You can do nothing finer.

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR NOVEMBER 21 EPHESIANS 6:1-9

THE BACKGROUND

Paul taught the believers at Ephesus to give careful attention to how they lived. They were not to live unwisely but rather wisely because the times were full of evil. The believers must know God's will and live in that will. God's will was that Christians allow the Holy Spirit to control their lives. One evidence of the Holy Spirit's control was that believers would submit "to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

Paul wanted a general submissiveness to prevail among the families in the Ephesian church. The apostle first addressed the relationship between husbands and wives. Paul then continued to explain how letting the Holy Spirit control one's life impacts relationships between children and parents as well as between slaves and masters. This lesson focuses on the latter two kinds of relationships — those between parents and children and those between employers and workers.

1. RESPECT FOR PARENTS (EPHESIANS 6:1-3)

Verse 1: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right.*

The word translated "obey" means "be subject to" and directed the Ephesian children to do what their fathers and mothers instructed them to do. Furthermore, the word "obey" is an imperative, communicating that children's compliance was not optional.

The phrase "in the Lord" refers to Christ here, just as it does in other references in Ephesians (see Eph. 2:21; 4:1,17; 5:8; 6:21). Some Bible scholars believe "in the Lord" refers only to children whose parents are Christians. However, the phrase likely has the same idea as a similar statement in Colossians 3:20: "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord." Thus obedience to parents by all children pleases the living Christ whether kids are Christians or not. Of course, no child should obey parental demands that contradict God's revealed laws in the Bible.

Verse 2: *Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—*

Paul cited the Old Testament (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) to support his teaching about children obeying their parents. The quotation is the Fifth Commandment in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. According to the law, a child's obedience is to father and mother, not just the father. When children obey both parents, they honor both parents. The form of the word translated "honor" emphasizes that honoring parents continually is not an option. Honoring one's parents involves loving, respecting, and regarding them highly. Honoring one's father and mother is a child's essential first step toward learning to honor God. Defiance toward parents likely will have a long-reaching result in the same defiant attitude and action toward God and His will.

Of course, when children grow up and leave home, obeying parents is no longer required. However, according to Jesus' teachings honoring one's parents is the right thing to do regardless of the age of either the parents or the children (Matt. 15:1-6; 19:19).

Paul interrupted his quotation of the Fifth Commandment to insert the phrase "which is the first commandment with a promise." Bible scholars struggle with the meaning of this expression because the Second Commandment has two promises: punishment for those who hate God but love for those who love God and obey Him. Some claim Paul's words mean that the Fifth Commandment is first because it is the first one with a specific promise, whereas the Second Commandment's promise is more general, being applicable to all the Commandments. Other Bible scholars contend that Paul meant the Fifth Commandment is first in importance. Still other scholars believe the statement means it is the first commandment children learn and that the phrase with a promise encourages their obedience to parents.

Verse 3: *that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land.*

This promise is imprecise, but it generally means that when a child exercises the self-discipline required to obey and honor his or her parents, the reward is longevity and well-being throughout his or her life. The opposite is also true. When a child disobeys and dishonors parents because he or she is undisciplined, the result, generally speaking, is a lack of well-being and even a shortened lifespan.

2. RESPECT FOR CHILDREN (EPHESIANS 6:4)

Verse 4: *And fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Paul had just commanded children to obey parents and to honor both father and mother. In Ephesians 6:4, however, he addressed only fathers. It is possible Paul had both parents in view, but because of the hierarchical structure of the family, the apostle viewed fathers as primarily responsible for children's overall care and well-being. That responsibility, Paul specifically pointed out, is both negative and positive.

Negatively, fathers are not to stir up anger in their children. The command is a firm prohibition — fathers are not to make a practice of provoking or exasperating their children to irritation and anger. Proper and necessary discipline has its place, but it should never be abusive. Abusive discipline will result in bitterness and resentment that may even encourage disobedience. Fathers also fail to measure up to Paul's counsel when they set standards so high children cannot reach them. The children's anger grows and grows out of frustration to please their fathers who repeatedly demean and nag them.

Positively, fathers are to train and instruct their children. The expression "bring them up" is a command. A father's responsibility is to nurture his child in two ways: by training and by instruction. These two words are similar in meaning. Both terms together emphasize using every means possible to help children grow in both knowledge and Christlike character.

3. RESPECT FOR EMPLOYERS (EPHESIANS 6:5-8)

Verse 5: *Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ.*

Christian slaves no doubt were in the congregation the day a church leader read Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. The apostle wrote words directly to them and expected their compliance with his instructions. He began with the instruction, "Slaves, obey your human masters." Paul taught that Christian slaves' duty was obedience to their masters. The word translated "obey" emphasizes obedience was mandatory. Paul then spelled out in detail the manner in which slaves were to serve their masters. Fear and trembling before their masters was appropriate. The phrase denotes reverential respect and a keen anxiety to avoid negligence of duty.

Christian slaves also were to obey out of the sincerity of their hearts, as to Christ. They were to serve wholeheartedly and completely, instead of pretending to work while actually loitering. To daily tasks, slaves must give strict attention and that from singleness of heart. Their service to their early masters was to be an expression of their commitment to their Heavenly Master, the Lord Jesus.

Verse 6: *Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men, but as slaves of Christ, do God's will from your heart.*

Paul elaborated on the statement “as to Christ” in verse 5. The phrase translated “Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men” can also be rendered “Don't work only according to eye service as people-pleasers.” Paul required that Christian slaves not serve merely to impress. Making a favorable (but false) impression while doing minimum work won't work. The apostle next stated the positive: “But as slaves of Christ, do God's will from your heart.” Obey masters as people who are slaves of Christ is the sense of Paul's instruction.

Verse 7: *Render service with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to men,*

Paul then further amplified the nature of the Christian slave's service to his or her master. Render service with a good attitude, or with goodwill. The aim of obeying and serving earthly masters with an attitude of goodwill is ultimately to please the Lord in heaven. Aware that bad treatment by their masters was likely to lead to bitterness and resentment, Paul reminded slaves that their first obligation was to the Lord and not to any person.

Verse 8: *knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord.*

At this point in his instructions to Christian slaves, Paul stated the reason for serving their masters with goodwill, not with anger and resentment: Because the Master in heaven would reward them. Knowing their reward would come later, and come from the Lord Himself, slaves could find strong motivation to keep serving their masters with the best intentions.

4. RESPECT FOR WORKERS (EPHESIANS 6:9)

Paul concluded his remarks about the submission of Spirit-filled believers by addressing Christian slave owners. The obligation of right conduct and fair dealing rested on masters just as much as on slaves.

Verse 9: *And masters, treat them the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their and your Master is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him.*

Masters' duties toward slaves were two: one positive, one negative. Paul's positive directive was treat them the same way, which meant owners were to treat their servants with respect, integrity, and goodwill. Masters were to apply Jesus' teaching about the Golden Rule to everyone, including their slaves (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31). If masters wanted slaves to promote their welfare, the masters must promote the slaves' welfare.

The second duty was negative — “without threatening them.” Paul pointed the masters' discipline away from the harsh and cruel treatment of slaves common in that time. The Christian slave owner must not be abusive and inconsiderate. Why not? Because both master and slave have the same Heavenly Master who showed no favoritism, partiality, or preferential treatment.

Paul's teaching about the owner/slave relationship in the first century has implications for the employer/employee relationship in the 21st century. Three guidelines mark the way for today's managers.

1. Treat employees with goodwill and integrity.
2. Avoid threats.
3. Be aware that you, as well as your employees, have a Heavenly Master who will impartially judge your attitudes and conduct in the workplace.

In summary, Paul instructed Christian slave owners to motivate their slaves not by threatening them but by exhibiting attitudes and taking actions that reflect the relationship they both have with Jesus Christ. We show respect for those we employ by compassionate, fair, and impartial treatment that reflects our relationship with the Lord.

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR NOVEMBER 28 EPHESIANS 6:10-24

THE BACKGROUND

The Letter to the Ephesians has two main parts. Chapters 1-3 are doctrinal in nature, and chapters 4-6 focus on application of that doctrine. In applying the truth to the Ephesians' lives, Paul repeatedly instructed believers about how to "walk," a term referring to lifestyle. He encouraged believers to walk in unity, holiness, love, light, and wisdom. He started the segment of the letter beginning in 6:10 with the word "finally" — literally "of the remaining" — to indicate he was nearing the end of the letter.

God's power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him "in the heavens" (Eph. 1:20) also can enable His people on earth to stand against spiritual wickedness "in the heavens" (6:12). Sometimes in our Christian experience we need to stop and take our stand. These are times when the Devil attacks with all his cunning and strength. During a satanic siege, the best defense is defense, not offense.

1. GET STRONGER (EPHESIANS 6:10-13)

Verses 10-11: *Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil.*

First, God's church can be strengthened by the Lord. The word translated "be strengthened" is a command that has the sense of continually receiving strength for the battle (see also 3:16). This strength comes by or in union with the Lord, referring to Christ. He, and He alone, is the Source of power sufficient to ward off the Devil's persistent charges against believers. Our own strength is puny compared to his power, but Christ's vast strength is more than sufficient to win any and all battles initiated by our archenemy. Strengthened by the living Christ, any believer can win the battle. Ultimately, Christ has defeated the Devil's power through His death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:56-57; Heb. 2:14) that ensures his ultimate punishment and removal from all influence over believers forever (Rev. 20:10).

Meanwhile the battle continues until that time, and

we must depend on the Lord's strength to win the victory over him. Think about the Devil's destruction of Peter's testimony of faith in Jesus (Luke 22:31-34,54-62), about Ananias, to whom Peter said, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie?" (Acts 5:3), and about Paul's unrelenting pain when a "messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7) tormented him. Believer, you and I must have Christ's strength when the Devil comes calling. That's our need when the hour to face him is on us.

How do believers experience the Lord's strength? Paul wrote that they must put on the full armor of God. This armor is not physical such as that a Roman soldier wore in battle. It is spiritual armor because the battle is spiritual.

Believers dress themselves in God's armor so they can stand against the tactics of the Devil. The words "stand against" convey the idea not of assault but of holding one's ground. This sense of defense also occurs in 6:13 ("resist," "take your stand") and in 6:14 ("stand, therefore"). Believers don't attack the Devil. He attacks them. He doesn't push around those who wear God's armor, however. The word "tactics" refers to subtle schemes or crafty strategies, and we know the Devil has plenty of them. If one doesn't work, he has another and another and another. Furthermore, having thousands of years' experience, the Devil knows which tactic likely will be a winner right out of the gate.

Verses 12-13: *For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.*

Paul stated that believers' enemies are not human. The fight is on, and it's against a supernatural foe. "Rulers, authorities, world powers of their darkness, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavens" point out what believers are up against. Paul did not explain details of these wicked forces, only that they exist. For this reason we must take up the full armor of God. These cosmic powers, these minions of the Devil, are a great, sophisticated, organized army pitted against God's church now, but Christ will crush them when He returns (Eph. 1:20-21). Until then, believers must resist the attacks of these evil forces. "The evil day" perhaps refers both to everyday attacks of the

Devil and especially to more vicious ones, times when spiritual conflict rages most severely. Such a "special" day came, for example, to Adam and Eve, Job, Jesus, and Paul. We, too, can expect the day when the Devil's attacks are particularly vicious and relentless.

2. STAND FIRM (EPHESIANS 6:14-17)

Before proceeding to look more closely at these verses, three general points need addressing. The first point is the verbs. Many of the verbs Paul used in these four verses are in a form that refers to the action as having already occurred. By repeating this verb tense, Paul was stressing for his readers what was utmost in importance, namely that believers must put on God's armor and keep it on. They must go to bed with it, wake up with it, and wear it all day long.

Second, believers are responsible for putting on and keeping on this armor. The third point is that Bible scholars differ in interpreting Paul's metaphors of Roman armor. Should they be understood objectively or subjectively? For example, does "truth" (6:14) refer to objective truth, doctrine one reads in the Scripture, or is truth subjective in the sense of sincerity, honesty, and integrity in a believer's life? Reading several Bible commentaries on Ephesians 6:14-17, the reader may discover that writers interpret one piece of armor subjectively and another objectively.

Verses 14-15: *Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.*

Paul's command to stand restates his idea in 6:11 about putting on the needed armor so that the believer can stand against the Devil's tactics. The first piece to which the apostle referred is truth that he stated was like a belt around a Roman soldier's waist. Many Bible scholars point out that Paul used the analogy of Roman armor because he was chained to a Roman soldier (6:20), and thus the apostle thought about the similarity of equipment needed for military battles and that needed for spiritual battles. In any case, Paul had many times seen Roman soldiers fully outfitted for battle.

The Roman belt held a soldier's garments together and held his sword as well. The belt symbolized truth the Christian believed and lived. The breastplate, or armor on the soldier's chest, was a metal plate that protected the

vital organs in the upper body. It represented the believer's righteousness of conduct and character. Some also see the breastplate of righteousness as a reference to the righteousness of justification. Of course, the believer's personal righteousness is a result of receiving God's justifying righteousness. The soldier also wore sandals, which Paul compared with the Christian's readiness for the gospel of peace. Believers who experience peace in their hearts because of the gospel can plant their feet and successfully take their stand against anything the Devil throws at them. Other scholars view this footwear as a reference to being ready to go and share the gospel.

Verses 16-17: *In every situation take the shield of faith, and with it you will be able to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word.*

The fourth piece of armor was a shield made of metal or wood, covered with leather, and large enough to protect the soldier's entire body from rocks, spears, and arrows. Some of those arrows were torch arrows shot from bows to set fire to clothing. Spiritually, the shield represented the Christian's trust, or faith, in the living God. Faith or dependence on God enables believers to deflect Satan's deadly missiles, or flaming arrows, for by faith they battle in His power and thus experience His protection. The helmet, of course, protected the soldier's head from traumatic injury. The sure and certain hope of Christ's salvation enables believers to stand confidently during the Devil's assaults against them. The sixth piece of armor, the sword, which was used both defensively and offensively, was the only offensive weapon. The Christian's sword is God's word, which Paul described as the sword of the Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit. The original term translated "word" refers to the spoken word of Scripture the believer can use against the Devil to stand firm against the vicious attacks. Jesus quoted the Old Testament to Satan when he tempted the Lord to sin against God (Luke 4:1-13).

The entire armor is absolutely essential in spiritual warfare. Christian, keep it on at all times. Only then can you deflect your adversary's attacks.

Let's take a brief second look at all this armor. The larger image here is a picture of Christ Himself. He is believers' truth. He is believers' righteousness. In Him we have peace. Christ is the object of our faith. He is our salvation, and He is the revelation of God's message to us. Apart

from Christ, we have no armor! With Him, we have all we need. Wearing spiritual armor is living in Him. When the Devil comes calling, we stand strong against him because we stand in Christ who is our strength. When Saul gave young David his armor, it was too cumbersome to wear in battle against Goliath, so David laid it aside. A sling and a few rocks, however, was all David needed because he went to battle not in his strength, but in the strength of the Lord of hosts. Christian, remember that Christ's strength is all you need when the battle rages.

Paul called on these Christians to stand firm on the basis of the spiritual armor God had provided for them. Using the spiritual armor that God provides, we can take a firm stand against evil.

3. PRAY ALWAYS (EPHESIANS 6:18-20)

Verse 18: *With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and stay alert in this, with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.*

Paul directed the believers to come to God with every prayer and request. We can offer many kinds of prayers. One is the prayer of adoration. Another is the prayer of confession. Two other kinds of prayer are thanksgiving and supplication. Using the acrostic ACTS can help you remember these four kinds of prayer. To pray at all times does not mean to pray around the clock, without stopping even to eat or sleep. Paul meant believers are never to take a vacation from prayer. We are to be people of prayer. If you're happy, pray. If you're despondent, pray. When you're with friends, pray, and pray when you're with enemies. Pray at the beach and at the hospital. Also, we are to pray "in the Spirit." This phrase does not refer to speaking in tongues or to praying in some dramatic fashion. Paul was referring to prayer directed to God that is motivated by and in the power of the Spirit. Prayer in the Spirit is always offered in harmony with God's will and is certain to have God's answer.

Paul then encouraged the Ephesians to stay alert in this kind of praying and to include in their prayers all the saints. Of course, Paul did not mean the Ephesians should know and pray for every believer by name. Believers can pray, however, for God's church in specific ways such as prayers for persecuted Christians, prayers for effective ministry, prayers for holiness of life, and prayers for believers who are known by name. The church is to be

a praying church that prays for itself as well as for others.

Verses 19-20: *Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough in Him to speak as I should.*

Paul also requested prayer for himself. The apostle's request was not for his release from confinement in chains. It was, first, that God would give him the message he needed to speak to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. Possibly, Paul was thinking of the time he would face his Jewish accusers before a Roman tribunal. He wanted the church's prayers so that when that moment came, God would give him the right words to explain the gospel of Christ and God's new work in the world — the creation of Christ's body of believers, both Jews and Gentiles.

Second, Paul requested the Ephesian believers to pray that he might be bold enough in Him to speak that message as he ought to speak it. The apostle needed both clarity and courage. Muddled speech before a Roman tribunal or in front of the Roman emperor would not do, nor would cowardly compromise. Paradoxically, Paul was an ambassador in chains, but his heart's desire was not to be unchained. Rather, he wanted to receive from God words to express the gracious gospel of his Savior, to lift to his lips the gospel trumpet and sound clear notes in the name of Jesus his Lord. No one knows with certainty the outcome of Paul's request for prayer. But we don't need to know. We know the Lord knows how He answered, and that is sufficient.

Paul acknowledged the necessity of prayer for Christians to resist evil and called the Ephesian believers to pray as they took on and used these pieces of armor, to pray on a persistent basis, and to pray for others including him. If we are to resist evil, we need to make prayer a consistent priority and that includes praying for one another.

4. BE ENCOURAGED (EPHESIANS 6:21-24)

Paul gave a short conclusion to his matchless message. He was about to send this letter to a gathering of believers in the distant province of Asia. Verses 21-24 express concern for others, reminding us that knowing friends are OK encourages us and challenges us to resist evil. In these closing verses the apostle informed the Ephesian church he was

sending Tychicus to encourage them with more information about his circumstances.

Verses 21-22: *Tychicus, our dearly loved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything so that you also may know how I am and what I'm doing. I am sending him to you for this very reason, to let you know how we are and to encourage your hearts.*

Tychicus was a dearly loved brother and faithful servant in the Lord. His name also appears in four other New Testament books (Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). Evidently Tychicus delivered Paul's Letter to the Ephesians as well as his Letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7) and the one to Philemon (Col. 4:9). In addition to delivering the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus for two other purposes. One was to let the Ephesian church know how Paul was doing and to encourage their hearts. Probably they were discouraged because of Paul's imprisonment. Tychicus would give an oral report to the Ephesians about how the apostle was faring while in prison, and that knowledge would comfort or encourage them.

Verses 23-24: *Peace to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul closed his epistle with a benediction. The great apostle's prayer was for peace, love with faith, and grace for those he knew had undying love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's heartfelt hope and prayer was that his beloved family of believers would live together in peaceful harmony as one family in Christ, loving Him and each other, and together recognizing that only by grace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ would his benediction pervade their lives.

After expressing concern for these Christians and his desire to encourage them, Paul closed this letter with words of peace and grace.