

Ephesians - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 6:10-20: The Conflict (6:10-20)

The Epistle to the Ephesians closes with a striking passage which sets forth the Christian conflict. This conflict is not the exercise of soul that we may pass through in seeking to lay hold of the truth. It supposes that we know and appreciate the wonderful truths of the epistle, and the conflict arises from seeking to retain and maintain these truths in the face of every opposing power.

In the course of the epistle the Apostle unfolds to us our heavenly calling, the inheritance of glory to which we are predestined, the mystery of the church, and the practical life consistent with these great truths. If, however, we are set to enter into our heavenly blessings and to walk in consistency with them, we shall at once find that all the power of Satan is arrayed against us. In his hatred of Christ, the devil will seek to rob us of the truth, or, failing to do this, he will seek to bring dishonor upon the Name of Christ and discredit the truth by bringing about moral breakdown amongst those who hold the truth. The more truth we have the greater the dishonor to Christ if we break down by the allowance of the flesh. We must therefore be prepared to face conflict, and the more truth we have the greater will be the conflict.

In view of this conflict, three things are brought before us: first, the source of our strength; secondly, the character of the enemy with whom we wrestle; thirdly, the armor with which we are provided to enable us to withstand the assaults of the enemy.

(1) the Power of the Lord.

(Eph. 6:10). The Apostle first directs our thoughts to the power that is for us before he describes the power that is against us. To face this conflict we must ever remember that all our strength is in the Lord, therefore Paul says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." Our difficulty oftentimes is to realize that we have no strength in ourselves. Naturally we should like to be strong in numbers, strong in gifts, or strong in the power of some forceful leader, but our real and only strength is "in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

The prayer of the first chapter brings before us the power of God's might. Christ has been raised from the dead and set at God's right hand in heavenly places, "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Now, says the Apostle, that is the "exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe." The power that is against us is far greater than our power, but the power that is toward us is a surpassing power-it surpasses all the power that is opposed to us. Moreover, the One that has supreme power is the One that possesses "unsearchable riches", and loves us with a love that "passeth knowledge" (3: 8, 19).

In the days of old, Gideon was prepared for the conflict by first being told, "The Lord is with thee"; then he was exhorted to "Go in this thy might." Gideon's family might be the poorest in Manasseh, and he himself the least in his father's house, but what did Gideon's poverty, or his weakness matter if the Lord, who is rich and mighty, was for him and with him (Judg. 6:12-15)? So, in a later day, Jonathan and his armor-bearer, could face a great host in the might of the Lord, for said Jonathan, "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

So we, in our day, with failure behind us, weakness amongst us, and corruption all around us, need a fresh sense of the glory of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the riches of the Lord, the love of the Lord, and, with the Lord before us, to go forward "in the power of His might."

Apart from Christ we have no power. The Lord can say, "Without me ye can do nothing", but, says the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). It is, then, only as our souls are kept in secret communion with Christ that we shall be able to avail ourselves of the power that is in Him. This being so, all Satan's power will be directed to putting our souls out of touch with Christ, and seeking to keep us from feeding on Him and walking in communion with Him. It may be that he will seek to draw us out of communion with Christ by the cares and duties of every-day life, or by sickness and weakness of the body. He may seek to use the difficulties of the path, the contentions among the people of God, or the petty insults we have to meet, to depress the spirit and fret the soul. If, however, instead of allowing all these things to come between our souls and the Lord, we make them occasions for drawing near to the Lord, we shall learn what it is to be strong in the Lord, while realizing our own weakness; and we shall learn the blessedness of the word, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Psa. 55:22).

2) the Power of the Enemy.

(Vv. 11, 12). First, we are exhorted to remember that it is not against flesh and blood that we wrestle. The devil may indeed use men and women to oppose the Christian and deny the truth, but we have to look beyond the instruments and discern the one that is using them. A woman, in flesh and blood, opposed Paul at Philippi, but Paul discerned the evil spirit that moved the woman, and in the power of the Name of Jesus Christ he entered into conflict with spiritual wickedness, commanding the evil spirit to come out of the woman (Acts 16:16-18).

A true disciple, in flesh and blood, opposed the Lord when Peter said, in view of the Lord's sufferings, "Be it far from Thee, Lord", but the Lord, knowing the power of Satan behind the instrument, could say, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:22,23).

The conflict, then, is against Satan and his hosts, whatever the instrument used. Principalities and powers are spiritual beings in a position of rule with power to carry out their will. They may be good or evil beings; here they are evil beings, and their wickedness would seem to take a twofold direction. In reference to the world they are the rulers of the darkness of this world; in reference to Christians they are the "spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies." The world is in darkness, in ignorance of God, and these spiritual beings rule and direct the darkness

of paganism, philosophy, science falsely so-called, and infidelity, as well as the superstitions, corruptions and modernism of Christendom. The Christian is brought into the light and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. The opposition to the Christian takes, then, a religious character by spiritual beings who seek to rob him of the truth of his heavenly calling, beguile him into a path that is a denial of the truth, or into conduct that is inconsistent with it.

Further, we are instructed as to the character of the opposition. It is not simply persecution, or a direct denial of the truth; it is the far more subtle and dangerous opposition described as "the wiles of the devil." A wile is something that looks fair and innocent, and yet beguiles the soul from the path of obedience. How often, in this day of confusion, the devil seeks to lead those who have the truth into some by-path, which at the beginning deviates so little from the true course that to raise any objection to it might seem fastidious. There is one simple question we can each ask ourselves by which every wile may be detected, "If I pursue this course, where will it lead me?"

When the devil suggested to the Lord that He should turn the stones into bread to meet His needs, it looked a very innocent thing to do, nevertheless it was a wile that would have led out of the path of obedience to God, and a denial of the word which said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

To turn the Galatian believers from the truth of the Gospel, the devil used the law as a wile to entrap them in legal self-importance. To turn the Corinthian saints from the truth of the assembly, the devil used the world as a wile to lead them into carnal self-indulgence. To turn the Colossian saints from the truth of the mystery, the devil used the wiles of "enticing words," "philosophy" and superstition to entrap them in religious exaltation. These are still the wiles we have to face.

(3) the Armor of God.

(V. 13). In this conflict human armor will not avail. We can only withstand the devil in the "armor of God." Human resources such as natural ability and natural strength of character will be of no avail in this conflict. Confidence in such armor may lead us to engage with the enemy, but only to suffer defeat. The Apostle Peter found this when, with confidence in his own strength, he entered into conflict, only to fail before a maid. God may indeed use human ability and scholarship in His service; here, however, it is not a question of what God uses in His service, but rather of what God has given us to use in conflict with the wiles of the enemy. The enemy we have to meet is not flesh and blood, and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4).

Furthermore, in this conflict we require the "whole armor of God." If one piece is missing Satan will be quick enough to detect the lack and attack us in the vulnerable place.

Moreover, the armor has to be "put on." It by no means follows that because we are Christians we have put on the armor. The armor is provided for us as Christians, but it remains with us to put it on. It is not enough to look at the armor, or to admire it, or to be able to describe it, we must "put on the whole armor of God."

Then we learn that the armor is needed in view of the "evil day." In a general sense the whole period of the absence of Christ is for the believer an "evil day." There are, however, occasions when the enemy makes special attacks upon the people of God, seeking to rob them of special truths. Such attacks constitute for the people of God an evil day. To meet such we need to have on the whole armor of God. It is too late to be putting on the armor in the midst of the struggle.

We need the armor "to withstand" and "to stand." Having withstood in resisting the enemy's offensive in any particular attack, we shall still need the armor to stand on the defensive. When we have "done all" we still need our armor in order "to stand." It is often when we have gained some signal victory that we are in the greatest danger, for it is easier to gain a point of vantage than to hold it. The armor having been "put on" cannot with safety be put off as long as spiritual wickedness is in heavenly places and we are in the scene of Satan's wiles.

1. the Girdle of Truth.

(V. 14). If we include the prayer as one of the pieces of armor, there are seven distinct pieces of armor. We are to stand with our loins girt about with truth. Spiritually this speaks of the thoughts and affections held in order by the truth. By applying the truth to ourselves, and thus judging all the thoughts and movements of the heart by the truth, we should not only be set free from the inward working of the flesh, but we should have our affections formed according to the truth, and thus have the lowly mind with our affections set on things above.

So the first piece of armor strengthens the inner man and regulates our thoughts and affections rather than our conduct, speech and ways. Oftentimes we make great efforts to preserve a correct outward demeanor towards one another while, at the same time, careless as to our thoughts and affections. If we are to withstand the wiles of the enemy we must commence by being right inwardly. The Preacher warns us as to what we say with our lips, as to what our eyes look upon, and as to the path our feet tread, but first of all he says, "Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded" (Prov. 4:23-27). James warns us that "If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth" (James 3:14). Strife amongst brethren commences in the heart, and has its root in "bitter envying." When the truth holds the affections, strife, bitter envying and other evils of the flesh will be judged, and when they are judged we shall be able to withstand the wiles of the devil in the evil day.

Alas! too often the evil day finds us unprepared. We have neglected to put on the girdle, and so in the presence of some sudden provocation we act in the flesh, and when reviled we revile again, and instead of patiently suffering we threaten. Let us seek to wear the girdle, and thus walk with the thoughts and affections habitually held in check by the truth.

2. the Breastplate of Righteousness.

With the second piece of armor we pass to our practical conduct. Practical righteousness is expressed in the Christian by a walk in consistency with the position and relationships in which he is set. We cannot stand before the enemy with a conscience that accuses us of unjudged evil in our ways and associations. We cannot stand for the truth which in practice we deny. Having put on the breastplate, and thus

walking in practical righteousness, We shall be fearless when called to face the enemy in the evil day.

3. the Feet Shod

(V. 15) Practical righteousness leads to a walk in peace. The Gospel of peace that we have received prepares us to walk in peace amidst the world's unrest. When the heart is governed by the truth, and our ways are practically in accord with the truth, we shall walk through this world with peace in the soul, and be able to meet the evil day in a spirit of peace and calm. We shall not be indifferent to the turmoil in the world, but we shall not be excited and filled with anxiety as to passing events. Of natural men the Scripture says, " the way of peace have they not known " (Rom. 3:17), but those whose feet are shod with peace are marked by peace even when in conflict.

4. the Shield of Faith

(V. 16). However necessary it is to have the thoughts and affections held in order by the girdle of truth, and our conduct preserved in righteousness by the breastplate, and to be walking in peace through this world, something else is needed for the conflict. We need " above all ", or " over all ", the shield of faith to protect us from the fiery darts of the enemy. Here faith is not the reception of God's testimony concerning Christ by which we are saved, but the daily faith and trust in God which gives us the assurance that God is for us. In the pressure of the manifold trials that come upon us, whether from circumstances, ill-health, bereavement, or in connection with the many difficulties that constantly arise among the people of God, the enemy may seek to cloud our souls with the horrible suggestion that after all God is indifferent and not for us. On that dark night when the disciples had to face the storm on the lake, and the waves beat into the ship, Jesus was with them, though asleep as one indifferent to their danger. This was a test for faith. Alas! unprotected by the shield of faith. a fiery dart pierced their armor, and the terrible thought arose that, after all, the Lord did not care for them, for they awoke Him and said, " Carest Thou not that we perish? " (Mark 4:37,38).

A fiery dart is not a sudden desire to gratify some lust which arises from the flesh within; it is rather a diabolical suggestion from without that would raise a doubt as to the goodness of God. Satan hurled a fiery dart at Job when, in his terrible trial, his wife suggested that he should " curse God, and die." Job quenched this fiery dart with the shield of faith, for he said, " Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? " (Job 2:9,10). The devil still uses the trying circumstances of life in his endeavor to shake our confidence in God and to drive us from God. Faith uses these very circumstances to draw near to God and thus triumphs over the devil. Again, Satan may seek to instill some abominable thought into the mind, some infidel suggestion that burns into the soul and darkens the mind. Such thoughts are not quenched by human reasonings, or by falling back on " feelings " or " experiences ", but by simple faith in God and His word.

5. the Helmet of Salvation

(V. 17). Having on the helmet will enable the believer to hold his head up boldly in the presence of the enemy. Resisting by faith the fiery darts of the devil, we find in our trying circumstances that God is for us, and that He saves us, not only from trials, but, like the disciples in the storm, through trials. We are thus enabled to go forward with courage and energy in the consciousness that, however weak we are in ourselves, God is the God of our salvation, and that Christ is able to save us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25).

6. The Sword of the Spirit.

We are definitely told that this piece of armor is the Word of God, and yet not only the Word, but the Word used in the power of the Spirit. This is the one great offensive weapon. Until we have put on the armor that regulates our inmost thoughts, our outward walk, and establishes us in confidence in God, we shall not be in a right condition to wield the sword of the Spirit. When the Word of God is used in the power of the Spirit against the enemy it is irresistible. When tempted by the wiles of the devil, the Lord on each occasion resisted the enemy with the Word of God used in the power of the Spirit. "It is written" exposed and defeated the devil. The Word of God abiding in us is our strength, for the Apostle John can say of the young men, "Ye Are Strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one " (1 John 2:14).

One has said, Our business is to act according to the word, come what may; the result will show that the wisdom of God was in it." The one using the word may be weak, and have little natural intelligence, but he will find that the word of God is quick and powerful, and that through it every wile of the enemy is exposed.

7. Prayer.

(Vv. 18-20). Having described the armor, and exhorted us to put it on, the Apostle closes with the exhortation to prayer. The armor, however perfect, is not given to make us independent of God. It can only be rightly used in the spirit of dependence upon the One by whom it has been provided.

The Lord exhorts us " always to pray, and not to faint " (Luke 18:1); and Paul exhorts "that men pray everywhere" (1 Tim. 2:8). Here we are exhorted to pray " at all seasons." Prayer is the constant attitude of dependence upon God. Under all circumstances, in all places, and at all times, we are to pray. Prayer however, may become a mere formal expression of need; it is therefore linked with " supplication ", which is the earnest cry of the soul conscious of its need. It is, moreover, to be under the guidance of the Spirit, and to be accompanied with the faith that watches for God's answer. When Peter was in prison " prayer was made without ceasing unto God for him ", but apparently the church failed somewhat in " watchfulness, for when God answered their prayer it was only with difficulty that they believed that Peter was free. Further, prayer in the Spirit will embrace " all saints ", and yet come down to the need of a special servant. So the Apostle exhorts the Ephesian saints not only to pray for " all saints ", but also for himself.

Throughout the ages the saints have needed the armor of God, but in these closing days, when " the darkness of this world " deepens, the wiles of the devil " increase, and Christendom is returning to paganism and philosophy, how deeply important it is to put on the whole armor of God to " withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

Let us then stand:

Having our loins girt about with truth, and thus be kept inwardly right in thought and affection;

Having on the breastplate of righteousness, so that we are consistent in all our practice;

Having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, so that we walk in peace in the midst of a world of discord, strife and confusion;

Taking the shield of faith, so that we walk in daily confidence in God;

Taking the helmet of salvation, and thus realizing that God is making all things work together for our good and salvation;

Taking the sword of the Spirit, whereby we can meet every subtle attack of the enemy;

Lastly, "praying always", so that we can use the armor in the spirit of constant dependence upon God.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5:22-6:9: The Believer's Walk in Connection With Natural Relations (5:22-33)

In this portion of the epistle we are exhorted as to the conduct that becomes Christians in connection with earthly relationships. The Apostle first speaks of the most intimate of relationships, wives and husbands (v. 22-33), then of children and parents (6:1-4), and finally of servants and masters (6:5-9).

As individuals we own Christ as Lord, and the responsibilities of every relationship are to be carried out in the fear of the Lord. The wife is to be subject to her own husband "as unto the Lord" (5:22); children are to obey their parents "in the Lord" (6:1); fathers are to train their children in the "admonition of the Lord" (6:4); servants are to do "service as to the Lord" (6:7); and masters are to remember that they have a Master in heaven.

(1) Wives and Husbands.

(Eph. 5:22-25) Christian wives are exhorted to submit to their husbands in everything and Christian husbands are exhorted to love their wives. Special exhortations always have in view the particular quality in which the individual addressed is likely to fail. The woman is liable to break down in submission, and is therefore reminded that the husband is the head of the wife, and that her place is to be subject. The man is more prone than the woman to fail in affection, therefore husbands are exhorted to love their wives.

In order to emphasize the subjection of the wife and the affection of the husband, the Apostle turns aside to speak of Christ and the church, and we learn the great truth that earthly relationships were formed after the pattern of heavenly relationships. When God first established the relationship of man and wife, it was after the pattern of that which then existed only in His counsels, Christ and the church. Thus on the one hand the relationship of Adam and Eve to each other, as husband and wife, becomes the first figure in Scripture of Christ and the church; and on the other Christ and the church are used to illustrate the true attitude of husbands and wives to each other. The wife is to be subject to her husband as the head, even as Christ is the Head of the church, and is the Savior of these mortal bodies. Again, if the husband is exhorted to love his wife, it is after the pattern of Christ and the church, for he is to love "even as Christ also loved the church."

It may be thought that the standard set is very high, and that the statements that wives are to be subject to their husbands in everything, and that husbands are to love their wives even as Christ loved the church, are very strong; but what wife would mind being subject to a husband that loved her even as Christ loved the church, and what husband would cease to love a wife who was always subject as the church should be to Christ?

The Apostle's heart is so full of Christ and the church that he takes occasion by these practical exhortations to bring before us a very vivid summary of the eternal relations of Christ and His church, to which we do well to take heed.

He reminds us that "Christ is the Head of the church"; that "Christ also loved the church"; and that Christ nourisheth and cherisheth the church. He is the Head to guide, He has the heart to love, and the hand to provide for her every need. Amidst all the difficulties we have to face, our unfailing resource is found in looking to Christ our Head for wisdom and guidance. In all our sorrows, and the failure of human love, we can count on the unchanging love of Christ that passeth knowledge; and in all our needs we can count upon His care and provision.

Moreover, the love of Christ is brought before us in a threefold way. There is that which His love has done in the past, what it is doing in the present, and what it will yet do in the future. In the past Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Not only did He give up a kingly crown, kingdom glories and earthly ease to tread a path of humiliation and sorrow, but at last He gave Himself. More He could not give.

He not only died for us in the past; He is living for us in the present. Today He is sanctifying and cleansing the church with the washing of water by the word. He is daily occupied with us, separating us from this evil world and practically cleansing us from the flesh. This blessed work is carried on by the application of the word to our thoughts and words and ways.

Let us remember that He did not first make the church worthy to be loved, then love it and give Himself for it. He loved it as it was, then gave Himself for it, and now works to make it suitable to Himself. God acted very blessedly on the same principle in regard to Israel. Jehovah could

say to Israel, " I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood... thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness... and entered into a covenant with thee... I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck.. and a beautiful crown upon thine head... thou wast exceeding beautiful... thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee " (Ezek. 16:6-14). Israel's time of need was God's time of love. So Christ loved the church in all its deep need, and gave Himself for it; then having possessed it He cleanses it and makes it suitable to Himself. We are not satisfied if someone we love is not to our liking, and Christ will never be satisfied until the church is perfectly suited to Him.

(V. 27). In the future, in His love, He will present the church to Himself " not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." The present sanctification of verse 26 is connected with the presentation in glory of verse 27: that is, the condition in which we shall be presented to Christ in glory, " holy and blameless "> is the measure of our sanctification even now. While here we shall not attain to the standard of glory, but there is no other standard. Moreover, the condition in glory is not only the standard of our sanctification, but, as perfectly set forth in Christ, it is the power of our sanctification.

" The word ", discovering to us what we are, and occupying us with Christ in glory, is the power for cleansing. The word and the sanctifying effect of Christ in glory are brought together by the Lord in His prayer, " Sanctify them by the truth: Thy word is truth ", and the Lord adds, " I sanctify myself for them, that they also may be sanctified by truth." The Lord set Himself apart in the glory as an object for His people on earth, and as we are occupied with Him we are changed into His likeness from glory to glory.

Alas! Christendom has entirely failed to walk in the light of these great truths concerning Christ and the church. In practice it has ceased to give Christ His place as Head, and consequently has failed in subjection to Him. Therefore we need hardly be surprised at the failure to maintain the relationships of life, formed after the pattern of Christ and the church, leading, on the part of the woman, to a widespread revolt against subjection to the man, and, on the part of the man, to unfaithfulness and lack of love for the woman. The ruin of Christendom, the scattering of believers that has split Christendom into innumerable sects, can all be traced to two evils—professing Christians have abandoned the place of subjection to Christ that belongs to the assembly, and have usurped the place of authority belonging to the Head.

The beginnings of these evils were found in the assembly at Corinth. There the Christians set up leaders in the place of Christ, and then formed themselves into parties in subjection to their chosen leaders. The evil which had its beginning at Corinth is fully developed in Christendom, where clericalism has practically set aside the Headship of Christ, and independence has taken the place of subjection to Christ.

(Vv. 28, 29). Having presented so blessedly the truth of Christ and the church, the Apostle returns to his practical exhortations. Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies, for so truly are they one that the husband can look at his wife as himself. As such, the man will delight to nourish his wife, meeting her every need, and cherish her as one that is very precious. Again the Apostle presents Christ, and His care for the church, as the perfect pattern for the husband's care for his wife. Not only has Christ died for us in the past, and is dealing with us in the present in view of eternity, but as we pass along our way, He watches over and cares for us, treating us as Himself. Because " we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones ". He could say to Saul of Tarsus, in the days when he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the saints, " Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? " One has truly said, "A man's flesh is himself, and Christ takes care of Himself in taking care of the church." Again, " Christ never fails, and there cannot be a want in Christ's church without there being an answer to it in Christ's heart."

(Vv. 31, 32). The man that loveth his wife loveth himself and he is to leave other relationships to be joined to his wife. The Apostle quotes from Genesis, but he expressly states that this is a great mystery which has in view Christ and the church. Christ, as Man, left all relations with Israel according to the flesh in order to secure His church.

(V. 33). Nevertheless, says the Apostle, while seeking to enter into these eternal truths of the great mystery of Christ and the church, let each husband see that he loves his wife as himself, and let the wife rightly fear her husband.

(2) Children and Parents.

(Eph. 6:1-3). It has been remarked that the exhortations in the Epistle to the Ephesians all commence with those from whom submission is due. The special exhortations are preceded by the general exhortation to submit yourselves one to another (v. 21).

The exhortations to submission are especially addressed to wives, children and servants, the wives being exhorted before the husbands, the children before the parents, and the servants before the masters. This order would seem to attach great importance to the principle of submission. One has said, " The principle of submission and obedience is the healing principle of humanity." Sin is disobedience and came into the world through disobedience. Ever since, the essence of sin has been man doing his own will and refusing to be subject to God. An insubject wife will make a miserable home; an insubject child will be an unhappy child; and a world not subject to God must be an unhappy and miserable world. Not until the world is brought into subjection to God, under the reign of Christ, will its sorrows be healed. Christianity teaches this subjection, and the Christian home should anticipate something of the blessedness of a subject world under the reign of Christ.

The obedience of the child is, however, to be " in the Lord." This supposes a home governed by the fear of the Lord, and therefore according to the Lord. The quotation from the Old Testament, which connects the promise of blessing with obedience to parents, shows how greatly God esteemed obedience under law. Though in Christianity the blessing is of an heavenly order, yet in the governmental ways of God the principle remains true that honoring parents will bring blessing.

(V. 4). Parents are not to bring up their children on the principle of law which might lead them to say to the child, " If you are not good God will punish you "; nor are they to bring them up on the principles of the world which have no reference to God. If they are trained simply with worldly motives, to fit them for the world, we must not be surprised if they drift into the world. Moreover, parents are to be careful not to irritate and repel their children, and thus destroy their influence for good by losing their affection. Only will their affections be retained, and the children kept from the world, as they are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They are to be trained as for the Lord, and as the Lord would bring them up.

(3) Servants and Masters.

(Vv. 5-9). For the Christian servant to render obedience to an earthly master, a heart that is right with Christ will be required. Only as the servant of Christ, seeking from his heart to do the will of God, will he be able to serve his earthly master with "good will." What is done of good will to the Lord will have its reward.

Christian masters are to be governed by the same principles as the Christian servants. In all his dealings with his servants the master is to remember that he has a Master in heaven. He is to treat his servants with the same "good will" that he expects from the servants. Moreover, he is to forbear threatening, not using his position of authority to utter threats.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 5:1-22: The Believer's Walk as a Child of God (5:1-21)

(Eph. 5:1). In this portion of the epistle believers are viewed, not only as owning that there is one God, but as being in relationship with God as His children. The whole passage exhorts us to walk as becometh children. The "therefore" of the first verse connects this portion with the last verse of the preceding chapter. God has acted towards us in kindness and grace, and now it becomes us to act towards one another as God has acted towards us. We are therefore exhorted to be imitators of God "as dear children." We are not to seek to imitate God in order to become children, but because we are children walking as "dear" children implies a walk governed by affection. A servant may walk rightly in legal obedience, but it becomes a child to walk in loving obedience. We are not servants but sons.

We cannot, and are not asked to, imitate God in His omnipotence and omniscience, but we are exhorted to act morally like Him. Such a walk will be characterized by love, light and wisdom; and in all these things we can be imitators of God. The Apostle, in the verses that follow, develops the walk in accord with these beautiful moral traits. First, he speaks of walking in love in contrast to a world marked by lust (verses 1-7). Secondly, he exhorts us to "walk as children of light" in contrast to those who live in darkness (verses 8-14). Finally, he exhorts us to "walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise" (verses 15-20).

(V. 2). First, then, as children, we are exhorted to walk in love. At once Christ is set before us as the great example of this love. In Him we see the devotedness of love that gave Himself for others, and this devotedness goes up to God as a sweet smelling sacrifice. Such love goes far beyond the demands of the law which requires that a man love his neighbor as himself. Christ did more, for He gave Himself to God for us. It is this love we are asked to imitate, a love that would lead us to sacrifice ourselves for our brethren. Such love will in its little measure, even as with the infinite love of Christ, go up as a sweet savor to God. The love that led the Philippian assembly to meet the necessities of the Apostle was to God "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (Phil. 4:16-18).

(V. 3). The love that is devoted to the good of others would shut out unholiness that gratifies the flesh at the expense of others, and the covetousness that seeks one's own gain. Our walk is to be as becometh saints. The standard of our morality is not simply the walk that becomes a decent man, but that which is becoming to saints. When it is a question of expressing love it is "as dear children"; when it is refusing lust it is "as becometh saints."

(V. 4). Moreover, the passing merriment that the world finds in filthiness, indecent talking and buffoonery is unbecoming in the saint. The quiet, deep joy of praise, not the laughter of the fool, becometh saints (Eccl. 7:6).

(V. 5). Those who are characterized by uncleanness, covetousness and idolatry will not only miss the blessings of the coming kingdom of Christ and of God, but being disobedient to the Gospel will come under the wrath of God. In contrast to this present evil world, the kingdom of God will be a scene in which love prevails, and from which lust is excluded. What will be true of the coming kingdom should mark the family of God today.

(V. 6). We are warned not to be deceived with vain words. Evidently, then, men with their philosophy and science will excuse lust and seek to throw a glamor of poetry and romance over sin in order to give it an attractive appearance. Nevertheless, because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience. "The sons of disobedience" are those who have heard the truth, but have rejected it. In a special way the Jews in Paul's day were, as a class, the sons of disobedience, but it is fast becoming true of Christendom. Men will, however, be judged for their wicked deeds, though the crowning sin will be disobedience to the Gospel.

(V. 7). With such we are to have no fellowship. The children of God and the children of disobedience can have nothing in common.

(Vv. 8-10). Secondly, once we were darkness, now we are light in the Lord. It is not simply that we were in the dark, as being ignorant of God, but we were characterized by a nature that is darkness, for it found its pleasure in everything that is contrary to God. Now we are partakers of the divine nature, and that nature is marked by love and light. Therefore the Apostle can say, not only that we are light, but that we are light in the Lord. Having come under the sway of the Lord we have come into the light of what is suited to Him. We shall love what He loves.

Being light in the Lord we are to walk as children of light, a walk that will show itself in "all goodness and righteousness and truth", for these things are the fruit of light. Thus walking we shall prove in our circumstances what is acceptable unto the Lord, and be a reproof to the unfruitful works of darkness. One has said, "A child while observing his father learns what is pleasing to him, and knows what he would like in the circumstances that transpire." It is in this way we prove "what is agreeable to the Lord."

(Vv. 11-13). Already we have been warned against having fellowship with evil workers: now we are warned against fellowship with the works of darkness. We should rather reprove them. To speak of the things that the flesh can do in secret is shame. The light of Christ reproves the evil that it exposes. In Christendom people cannot publicly commit gross sins that are openly committed in heathendom. The light in Christians is too strong. Alas! as the light declines sins again become more public and open.

(V. 14). The unbeliever is dead to God. The true believer, if not heeding these exhortations, may fall into a condition of sleep in which he is like a dead man. In such a condition he will not profit by the light from Christ. The exhortation to such an one is, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." It has been well said, " It is Christ Himself who is the source, the expression, and the measure of light for the soul that is awake."

(Vv. 15-17). Thirdly, we are exhorted to walk wisely. Learning from the first fourteen verses that the true measure for a right walk is God's nature of light and love, we are to profit by this teaching, and " walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise." In an evil world the Christian will need wisdom, but this wisdom is in regard to what is good. So, in another epistle, the Apostle can write, " Be wise as to that which is good, and simple as to evil " (Rom. 16:19). Our wisdom will be seen in redeeming the time, and understanding what the will of the Lord is. The days are evil, and if the devil could have his way there never would be a time or opportunity for that which is pleasing to the Lord. To do good we shall, as it were, have to seize the occasion from the enemy. If understanding the will of the Lord, we shall often find that an evil day can be turned into an occasion for doing good. Nehemiah, by prayer and fasting, learned the will of the Lord concerning His people, so that when the opportunity came, in the presence of king Artaxerxes, he seized the occasion (Neh. 1:4; 2:1-5). It is possible to have a great knowledge of evil and yet be ignorant of the will of the Lord, and thus still be " unwise."

(Vv. 18-21). Divinely-given wisdom will lead to sobriety in contrast to the excitement of nature. The world may work up some passing excitement leading to excesses of evil, but the Christian has a source of joy within, the Holy Spirit. Having the Spirit we are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit. If the Spirit were ungrieved, and allowed to control our thoughts and affections, the result would be a company of people entirely apart from the world and its excitements, that rejoiced together in a life of which the world has no knowledge, and in which it can find no pleasure. This life finds its expression in praise that flows from hearts that delight in the Lord. It is a life that discerns the love and goodness of God in " all things ", however trying the circumstances may be. It therefore gives thanks at all times for all things unto God and the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this, as in all else for the Christian, Christ is our perfect example, for, when rejected by Israel in spite of all His mighty works, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth " (Matt. 11:25).

Moreover, if filled with the Spirit, we should be marked by that spirit of lowliness and meekness that would lead us to submit to one another in the fear of Christ, in contrast with the self-importance of the flesh that asserts itself and its liberty to act without reference to the consciences of others.

Thus the believer filled with the Spirit will be marked first, by a spirit of praise to the Lord; secondly, by submission with thanksgiving to all that the Father allows; thirdly, by submission to one another in the fear of Christ.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, Ephesians 4:17-32: The Believer's Walk as Confessing the Lord (4:17-32)

(Eph. 4:17-19). The Apostle has exhorted us to a walk that becomes believers in relation to the assembly. He now exhorts us to the individual walk that is becoming to those who confess the Lord in an evil world. He testifies to us in the Lord, whose Name we have professed, that henceforth we should no longer walk as other Gentiles. This leads the Apostle to give a brief but vivid picture of the condition of the unconverted Gentile world. Such walk in a vain show and follow vain things. Their minds are darkened, being wholly ignorant of God and of the life that is according to God. They are ignorant of God because their hearts are hardened by the evil lives they live, for such have given themselves over to lasciviousness. We thus learn it is the evil lives men live that hardens the heart; that the hardened heart darkens the understanding; and that the darkened understanding leaves men a prey to every vanity.

(Vv. 20-24). In contrast to the vain and ignorant life of the Gentile world, the Apostle presents the life that follows from the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. It has been pointed out that the Apostle does not say as the truth is in Christ." This would have brought in believers and their position before God in Christ. He uses the personal name, Jesus, to bring before us a right practical walk as set forth in His personal path. As one has said, " He says ' Jesus ', therefore, because he is thinking, not of a place that we have in Him, or of the results of His work for us, but simply His example, and Jesus is the Name belonging to Him as here in the world."

The truth set forth in Jesus was the truth as to the new man, for He is the perfect expression of the new man that bears the character of God Himself - " righteousness and true holiness." The truth, then, as it is in Jesus is, not the reformation of the old man, nor the changing of the flesh into the new, but the introduction of the new man, which is an entirely new creation bearing the character of God. The first man was not righteous, but innocent. He had no evil in him, and no knowledge of good and evil. The old man has the knowledge of good and evil, but chooses unrighteousness and corrupts himself according to his deceitful lusts. The new man has the knowledge of good and evil, but is righteous, and therefore refuses the evil.

The truth that we have learned in Christ has been set forth in Jesus. The truth that we have been taught and learned in Him is that in the cross we have put off the old man and have put on the new. In the light of this great truth we are, in our daily path, as a present thing, being renewed in the spirit of our minds. Instead of the mind of the flesh, which is enmity against God, we have a renewed mind marked by righteousness and holiness, which refuses the evil and chooses the good. The new man does not mean the old man changed, but an entirely new man, and the "renewing" refers to the daily life of the new man.

The Apostle does not say we are to put off the old man, but says, "having put off... the old man" The old man has been dealt with at the cross, and faith accepts what Christ has done. We have not to die to sin, but to reckon ourselves as having died to sin in the Person of our Substitute.

(V. 25). In the remaining verses of the chapter the Apostle applies this truth to our individual conduct. We are to put away the deeds of the old man, and put on the character of the new man. We are to put away lying and speak truth, remembering that we are members one of another. This being so, it has been truly said, " If I lie to my brother it is as if I deceived myself." We see, too, how the great truth that believers are members of one body has a practical bearing on the smallest details of life.

(V. 26). We are to beware of sinning through anger. There is such a thing as being rightly angry, but such anger is indignation against evil, not against the evildoer, and behind such anger there is grief on account of the evil. Thus we read of the Lord that He looked on the wicked leaders of the synagogue " with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts " (Mark 3:5). The anger of the flesh ever has self in view: it is not grief on account of evil, but resentment against one that has been offensive. This fleshly anger against the evildoer will only lead to bitterness that occupies the soul with thoughts of revenge. The one entertaining such thoughts finds himself continually fretting, and in this sense lets the sun go down upon his wrath. Anger against evil will lead to grief that finds its resource in turning to God, where the soul finds rest.

(V. 27). We are warned that by acting in the flesh, whether in anger or in any other way, we open the door for the devil. Peter, by his self-confidence, made room for the devil to lead him into a denial of the Lord.

(V. 28). The life of the new man is in entire contrast to the old, so that the one characterized by stealing from others becomes a contributor to him that needs.

(V. 29). in conversation we are not to speak of those things which would corrupt the minds of the hearers, but rather to speak of that which edifies and ministers to a spirit of grace in the hearers.

(Vv. 30, 31). In the first part of the chapter the exhortation to a worthy walk flows from the great truth that believers collectively are the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. Here we are reminded that as individuals we are sealed by the Spirit. God has marked us out as His own in view of the day of redemption by giving us the Spirit. We are to beware of grieving the Holy Spirit by allowing bitterness, the heat of passion, wrath and noisy clamor, injurious language and malice.

(V. 32). In contrast to the evil speaking and malice of the flesh, we are to be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving towards one another in the consciousness of the way God has acted towards us in forgiving us for Christ's sake.

clickbible.org