



THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY 8 FAMILY LIFE & SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Ephesians 6:1-21

In this last chapter we have three separate sections, the first addressing children and parents, masters and slaves; the second depicting the Christian life as one ongoing spiritual battle, and the third giving Paul's concluding words.

Practical Advice to Those Living Under the One Roof

In Ephesians 6:1-9, following his words to husbands and wives, Paul continues to give practical advice to those living under the one roof. Often a family home included three generations and slaves. Again we must appreciate the taken-for-granted social realities of the first century if we are to understand Paul rightly. He is assuming most of the Ephesians were either slave masters or slaves. About a quarter of the population were slaves, often taken in war. Just like we have labour saving devices free Roman citizens bought slaves. Paul speaks against treating slaves badly but he does not condemn slavery as such. He sends the slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon. Only from the late eighteenth century did Christians begin opposing slavery. When it comes to children Paul also assumed the cultural norms of the day, believing that as long as parents lived they should be obeyed. The word 'child' in Greek and English primarily denotes relationship not age. In addressing children in this theological treatise Paul definitely did not have in mind small children.

- Q.1. *How do you think family life in Paul's day would have been different to what we know today? What changes have been good and what bad?*
- Q. 2. *How does it impact the way we understand Ephesians 5:21-6:9, that when Paul addresses husbands, fathers and masters he is talking to one male person who held those roles in the household?*
- Q. 3. *Perhaps we may not think we ought to obey our parents all our life, but what about honouring our parents all our life. What would this mean in practice? In what ways do you or people you know 'honour parents'?*
- Q. 4. *What behaviour might make grown up children angry with their parents? Do some parents need this advice? Why? In what ways can fathers sometimes exasperate their children?*

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- Q. 5. *Paul told slaves to obey their masters with 'fear and trembling' as if they are obeying Christ (v. 5). And in v. 6 to 'render service with enthusiasm'. These words show Paul was definitely not a social revolutionary. Why is this so? How might this injunction be translated into action in our contemporary world?*
- Q. 6. *How does the fact that the masters and the slaves Paul is addressing have the same Lord change things for both parties (v. 9). Should we compare or contrast the twenty first century employee and the first century slave?*
- Q. 7. *What impact does Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" and 6:9 "you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him" have on the way we understand this entire passage on how Christian households should function?*

Spiritual Warfare

In 6:10-17 Paul tells his readers the battles and pressures they are facing are not coming just from earthly opponents. In reality they are under attack by spiritual forces who use people and events to hurt them. I am sure we have all heard a children's talk on this passage but this is not childish teaching. We ignore Paul's words to our own peril.

- Q. 8. *What do you think of the idea that the church and individual Christians are under attack by spiritual powers opposed to God and his people? Can we set this aside as just old fashioned teaching about hell and satan?*
- Q. 9. *Do you sometimes feel you are under spiritual attack? If so what do you do about it? What does Paul advise?*
- Q. 10. *Four times in vv. 11-14 Paul urges his readers to stand firm under this assault. How do we do this? Do Christians all too often give way under pressure of one sort or another? How can we encourage one another?*

Paul's Concluding Words to the Ephesians

- Q. 11. *What does it mean to pray at all times' (v 18)? Do we do this? Can we realistically do this?*
- Q. 12. *After speaking about the spiritual battle Christians are involved in Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him (v. 19). Do you think church leaders are more likely to find themselves under spiritual attack? If so why? Do we pray for our church leaders?*

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When Paul wrote Ephesians he was in prison in Rome (Eph. 4:1). The chains he mentions (6: 20) may well have been the chains that bound him to a prison guard. His experiences in prison may have inspired the imagery he uses in speaking of spiritual warfare. It seems, nevertheless, that Paul continued to use every opportunity to be an ‘ambassador’ for Christ.

- Q. 13. *Have we ever found opportunities to witness when facing really tough times? What does it mean to be an ‘ambassador for Christ’? You may wish to share your experiences of ‘fearlessly making known the mystery of the gospel’ even in personally tough times.*
- Q. 14. *What have you learned from this passage? A number of people in the group may like to respond to this question.*

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