

Ephesians Chapter 6:

Introduction

Ephesians 6 serves as the concluding chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, summarizing the ethical and theological teaching that precedes it, while also offering practical instructions for various relationships within the household and beyond. It culminates with a powerful exhortation to stand firm in the spiritual battle against evil through the armor of God. This chapter connects the practical, relational aspects of Christian living with the overarching spiritual realities of the Christian life. It touches on key themes like submission, spiritual warfare, and the Christian's dependence on God's strength.

Historical and Cultural Context

Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome (circa AD 60–62). The letter addresses a primarily Gentile Christian audience in Ephesus, a prominent city in the Roman Empire, known for its large pagan temple dedicated to Artemis and its intellectual and cultural significance. The Christian community in Ephesus faced considerable pressure to maintain their faith in a pagan society and deal with the complexities of living as a minority group in a highly pluralistic world.

Chapter 6 transitions from teachings about the individual Christian's relationship to the body of Christ (chapters 1–3) and practical living (chapter 4–5) to instructions on Christian relationships in the home, workplace, and spiritual realms. The themes of submission, obedience, and spiritual warfare reflect a Christian ethic that is countercultural in a Roman context where hierarchy, authority, and power dynamics were central to society.

Structure of Ephesians Chapter 6

1. **Children and Parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)**
2. **Slaves and Masters (Ephesians 6:5-9)**
3. **The Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20)**

1. Children and Parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Paul begins this section with instructions for children to obey their parents "in the Lord," because this is right (v. 1). He links obedience to the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12), promising long life as a reward for honoring one's father and mother. Paul then addresses fathers, warning them not to provoke their children to anger but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Obey”** (Greek: *hypakouō* - ὑπακούω): This verb means "to listen to" or "to heed." It conveys the idea of respect and submission, particularly in the context of authority.
- **“Honor”** (Greek: *timaō* - τιμάω): This verb means "to honor, value, or esteem highly." It is used in the context of showing proper respect and reverence, especially in relation to parents.
- **“Provoke”** (Greek: *orgizō* - ὀργίζω): Paul warns fathers not to exasperate or provoke their children to wrath. This suggests the idea of harsh or unjust treatment that could lead to bitterness or rebellion.

Theological Concepts:

- **Obedience and Respect in Family Life:** Paul underscores the importance of family relationships as an arena for godly living. Obedience to parents is not only a societal expectation but a divine command with spiritual significance.
- **Parental Responsibility:** Fathers are charged with nurturing their children, balancing authority with love and gentleness. Parental discipline is not about provoking resentment but is rooted in godly care and instruction.

Application for Today:

- **Children’s Obedience:** The command for children to obey their parents is still relevant today. In a world that often challenges authority and respects individualism, Christian children are called to honor their parents, reflecting godly order.
- **Fathers’ Responsibility:** Fathers (and parents in general) are encouraged to discipline and instruct their children with patience and love, avoiding harshness or inconsistency. The goal is to nurture children in faith, guiding them toward Christlike living.

2. Slaves and Masters (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Paul addresses slaves in this passage, instructing them to obey their earthly masters with sincerity, "as to the Lord," and to serve with goodwill (v. 5-7). Masters, in turn, are to treat their slaves justly and fairly, remembering that they also have a Master in heaven (v. 9).

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Obey”** (Greek: *hypakouō* - ὑπακούω): Again, the verb implies a respectful submission, but here Paul emphasizes the servitude of slaves to their earthly masters as part of their broader submission to Christ.
- **“Serve”** (Greek: *douleuō* - δουλεύω): This verb literally means "to serve as a slave" or "to be enslaved." Paul connects this to the idea of serving Christ, transforming an earthly role of servitude into an opportunity for worship.
- **“Just” and “Fair”** (Greek: *dikaios* - δίκαιος; *isotēs* - ἰσότης): Masters are called to treat their slaves with justice, implying fairness, equity, and integrity in their dealings, recognizing the dignity of those they oversee.

Theological Concepts:

- **Work as Worship:** Both slaves and masters are reminded that their work is ultimately done for the Lord, which gives all labor, whether lowly or high, spiritual significance. Service to earthly masters is an expression of serving God Himself.
- **Equality in Christ:** While the social system of slavery is not directly addressed or overturned here, the reminder to masters that they too have a Master in heaven levels the playing field before God. This teaching has often been cited as a foundational principle for the eventual abolition of slavery.

Application for Today:

- **Work as Worship:** Christians today can take comfort in knowing that all work is significant when done for the Lord, whether in a position of power or in a subordinate role. Our attitudes and actions in the workplace should reflect our ultimate allegiance to Christ.
 - **Fairness and Justice:** Employers and those in authority today are called to treat their employees with respect and fairness, upholding justice and integrity in their dealings, which honors Christ as our ultimate Master.
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3. The Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20)

This section concludes the letter with a call to spiritual vigilance and strength. Paul exhorts believers to "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (v. 10), and he outlines the armor of God that believers must put on in order to stand against the schemes of the devil (v. 11).

Key Greek Words and Verbs:

- **“Be strong”** (Greek: *endunamoo* - ἐνδυναμόω): This verb implies a continuous strengthening in the Lord. It is not a passive state but an active reliance on God's power and strength for endurance.
- **“Stand”** (Greek: *stēnēmi* - ἵστημι): This verb is used repeatedly in this section (vv. 11, 13, 14), and it conveys the idea of standing firm or holding one's ground. It is a military metaphor for resisting attack.
- **“Armor”** (Greek: *panoplia* - πανοπλία): This word refers to a full set of armor. Paul uses this imagery to describe the spiritual resources available to Christians to withstand spiritual battles.

Theological Concepts:

- **Spiritual Warfare:** Paul emphasizes that the Christian life is a battle, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (v. 12). The "armor of God" represents the tools and strength believers need to resist the devil's schemes.
- **The Full Armor of God:** The armor includes elements such as truth (belt), righteousness (breastplate), readiness to preach the gospel (shoes), faith (shield), salvation (helmet), and the Word of God (sword). Each piece symbolizes an aspect of the Christian's identity and relationship with God, equipping them for the battle against evil.
- **The Role of Prayer:** Prayer is integral to the armor of God (v. 18), and it is through prayer that believers remain connected to God, draw strength, and engage in spiritual warfare.

Application for Today:

- **Standing Firm in Faith:** Christians are engaged in spiritual warfare and must be proactive in wearing the armor of God daily. This includes holding to the truth of the gospel, living righteously, and relying on God's Word and faith to resist temptation.

- **The Power of Prayer:** Prayer is not merely a routine but a powerful weapon in the spiritual battle. Believers are encouraged to pray in all situations, seeking God's strength and interceding for others.
 - **Resisting Temptation and Evil:** In a world where evil is prevalent, Christians must remain vigilant and equipped. By wearing the armor of God, believers are empowered to resist not only the personal attacks of the enemy but also the broader spiritual forces that shape culture and society.
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Summary

Ephesians 6 concludes Paul's letter with powerful and practical instructions for Christian living. The chapter emphasizes submission in relationships (children to parents, slaves to masters) but also stresses the importance of love, care, and fairness in these relationships. The final section, the "armor of God," provides a vivid metaphor for the spiritual warfare Christians face. Believers are called to stand firm in their faith, relying on the strength and power of God to resist the evil one. With the armor of God—truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, and the Word of God—believers are equipped to navigate spiritual battles and live victorious lives in Christ.

Study Questions Chapter 6:

1. Children and Parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)

- Paul instructs children to obey their parents and fathers not to provoke their children. How can we foster a home environment that reflects these instructions?
 - What does it mean to "honor" our parents today? How can we show honor to our parents in a way that is appropriate for our age and life stage?
 - Fathers are encouraged not to provoke their children to anger but to bring them up in the Lord's discipline. What are some practical ways fathers can discipline and guide their children in a godly manner?
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2. Slaves and Masters (Ephesians 6:5-9)

- In the context of our modern workplaces, what does it mean for Christians to "serve as though serving the Lord" (v. 7)? How can we maintain this mindset in a secular or difficult work environment?

- Paul calls masters to treat their slaves justly and fairly, recognizing they have a Master in heaven. How can this principle be applied in today's workplace relationships between employers and employees?
 - How can we ensure that our work, whether in a position of authority or submission, is an act of worship to God? What shifts in mindset might this require?
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3. The Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20)

- Paul encourages us to be strong in the Lord and put on the full armor of God. What does it look like to "be strong in the Lord" practically in your daily life?
 - What specific piece of the armor of God (truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word) do you feel you need to focus on more in your life right now? Why?
 - In verse 12, Paul explains that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. How can we recognize and resist spiritual attacks in our lives today?
 - What role does prayer play in our spiritual battles? Verse 18 encourages prayer in the Spirit on all occasions. How can we make prayer a more integral part of our spiritual defense?
 - The armor of God includes the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). How can we better use Scripture to defend against temptation or spiritual attacks?
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4. Spiritual Warfare and Standing Firm (Ephesians 6:10-20)

- What are some of the "schemes of the devil" you encounter in your life (e.g., temptation, discouragement, division)? How can you be more aware of these tactics and resist them with the armor of God?
 - Verse 13 says to "stand firm" when facing spiritual battles. What does it mean to "stand firm" in your faith during difficult times? How can you support one another in standing firm?
 - In verse 18, Paul urges us to pray on all occasions. How does prayer relate to the spiritual battle we are called to engage in?
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5. Personal Reflection and Application

- In what area of your life do you feel the need to put on more of the armor of God? Which piece of the armor do you feel most drawn to or challenged by?
- What is a recent situation where you needed to "stand firm" in your faith? How did the Lord help you through it?
- How can we encourage one another to live with more spiritual awareness and reliance on God's power, especially when facing temptation or challenges?

- Paul urges believers to pray for one another (v. 18). How can we pray for each other and support one another in the spiritual battles we face?
 - How does understanding the reality of spiritual warfare change the way you approach your day-to-day life, relationships, and challenges?
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6. Closing Discussion Questions

- What is one key takeaway from Ephesians 6 that you want to apply to your life this week?
- How can we as a small group "stand firm" together in the spiritual battles we face in the coming days?
- Is there anything specific you need prayer for in relation to spiritual warfare or any challenges you're facing that require God's strength and protection?