

Love and Respect

September 17 – Ephesians 5:22-33

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Day 259 – 106 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul challenged husbands and wives to “walk in a manner worthy of their calling” (4:1). Our passage must be linked to Paul’s previous thoughts (5:18-21), that when believers allow the Spirit to control their lives, there are changes that occur. For example, when Christians are under His influence, they will be “submissive to one another” (v.21), which Paul expanded in today’s passage.

Marriage was God’s idea. Therefore, He has the authority and right to define marriage for us. We do not have the right to define marriage for ourselves. God’s definition of marriage is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. He established marriage for several reasons — for procreation, for the establishment of the family (the building block of any civilization), and to represent the relationship between the Lord and His Church (v.23-30). Thus, for the world to redefine marriage is to destroy one of God’s institutions and to mar the image of Christ and His Bride.

In marriage, the man and woman are equals but each of them has God-given roles. First, “wives are to be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord” (v.22). Subjection does not mean that women are inferior to men, that women are to be subservient to men, that wives are to endure abuse of any kind, or that women are to have no say in a marriage or family. Submission is a woman’s daily voluntary choice, not to be demanded or imposed by force.

Why should the wife choose to submit to her husband? She submits to him because he is the God-ordained “head of the wife” and home (v.23). **She submits to him out of love, support, and respect** (v.33), and she submits to him in honor of the Lord, despite the husband’s worthiness or spiritual condition (v.22). A wife’s submission to her husband does not happen naturally or easily. She must draw near to the

Lord and first submit to the influence and direction of His Spirit (v.18).

Paul then addressed husbands, who are to “love their wives as themselves” (v.25, 28, 33). While sensual love is natural or emotional, the love Paul described here is not. He used the word *agape* love, which is sacrificial love, meaning that a husband is to serve her, “nourish and cherish” her (v.29), praise her, lead her, protect her, remain loyal to her (leave and cleave, v.31), pray for and with her, encourage her, and provide for her. That type of love is not natural. Men do not naturally think of anyone but themselves. Thus, for men to sacrifice time, effort, and resources to meet the needs of their wives (even when they can be unlovable) is unnatural.

However, men are commanded to “love their wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her” (v.25). **This is a high standard of love, one that cannot be accomplished in the flesh. That kind of love must be supplied by God through the power of the Spirit.** Therefore, men must draw near to the Lord and allow Him to love through them. If men fall away spiritually, then their marriage relationship will suffer as a result.

Daily Reflection

Wives need love, and husbands need respect. If both draw near to the Lord, these things will be present in a marriage. With His help, the bonds of marriage will strengthen over time.

Describe a marriage you have witnessed that best exemplifies this passage.

As Unto the Lord

September 18 – Ephesians 6:1-9

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Day 260 – 105 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul continued to explain the changes that occur when believers allow themselves to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit (5:18). So far, he has addressed the topic of words, attitudes, and marriage (v.19-23). Next, he extended this application to the family and workplace.

Paul's first charge is to children. They are commanded to "honor their father and mother" by obeying them (6:1, 2). Of course, there are all kinds of parents and all styles of parenting, but as long as the child is not being asked to do something immoral, he should obey. Parents who do not expect obedience from a child are raising a menace to society; and children who do not obey their parents are defying God's natural order ("for this is right," v.1) and setting themselves up for a miserable life (v.3).

But notice that Paul went much farther than obedience. He challenged kids to honor their parents. Honor includes one's heart or attitude. How and when a child obeys is just as important as why he obeys. Kids should treat their parents with respect as they would with God (v.1).

Next, Paul addressed fathers (v.4). Although this admonition could apply to both parents, fathers are singled out because they have been given the role as head of the wife and home (5:23). While both parents should teach, train, discipline, and manage children, ultimate supervision falls to the father (1 Tim. 3:4, 12).

Paul challenged fathers (parents) not to "provoke their children to anger," which means not to frustrate, aggravate, or exasperate them. This can happen for many reasons: an unhealthy or unstable marriage, unbridled anger, hurtful words, manipulation, inconsistent discipline, narrow or inflexible restrictions, favoritism, refusal to admit mistakes, physical or emotional neglect, and ignoring a child's words, desires, or interests.

Two of the divine duties of the father (or parents) are discipline and instruction. Children need clear boundaries and accountability, which is best provided by a loving father. Parenting requires a delicate balance of love and law, limitations and liberties, order and flexibility. Of course, mothers can also provide these things. They often do, but fathers must take the lead and muster the courage and character to bend the will of children to the rule of law, first in the home, then in society, and ultimately to God.

But discipline is more than punishment. It involves proactive training and instruction, not just reactive. It is best to make standards and purposes clear, before infractions, then gently correct and guide children through infractions, rather than to explode in anger and punish children after infractions. Effective godly instruction must be intentional and consistent. Parents must take advantage of every opportunity to train their children.

Notice that both children and fathers (parents) are to do their duties as unto the Lord. It is out of our reverence for Him that we fulfill our roles.

Finally, Paul applied the same principle to employees (slaves, 6:5-8) and employers (masters, v.9). **Christians should be the best employees, because we serve with "sincerity of heart as unto the Lord"** (v.5). Likewise, Christians should be the best employers, as we will treat those who work for us with kindness and respect, knowing that we will be accountable to God for our words and actions.

Daily Reflection

Whether it is a spouse, a parent, an employee, or employer, a follower of Christ will be subject to others as unto the Lord (5:21). None of these things are simple or easy, but **when we submit to the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Lord can and will affect our relationships for good.**

Standing Firm

September 19 – Ephesians 6:10-17

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Day 261 – 104 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul has reached the end of his letter to the Ephesians. But he had one final message with which to challenge his readers. Since Christ has accomplished redemption and afforded every spiritual blessing (*Eph. 1-3*), and since He expects us to live a Spirit-filled life worthy of our calling (*4:1-6:9*), then we must understand that we are now participants in a spiritual war (*6:12*). This war has been raging since the beginning of time, when Lucifer rebelled against God in heaven (*Isa. 14; Ezek. 28*). As such, we must also expect an active enemy who will exert every effort to disqualify us as combatants and to destroy our effectiveness.

Notice that Paul wrote that our enemy has a plan, a strategy for this war, for he urged us “to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*). What are some of the devil’s schemes? They include fear, frustration, moral failure, distractions, discouragement, doctrinal error, persecution, confusion, chaos, and much more. Neither he nor his demons can indwell followers of Christ, but they can certainly harass and oppress us (*1 Jn. 4:4*). They know our weaknesses. They’ve been studying man for thousands of years. But we should never fear them or be obsessed with them, for God has overcome them (*Jn. 16:33; Col. 2:15*). They fear Christ, and they have already lost.

However, there is a great deal of wisdom in this passage. First, **for Christians to understand the world, we must realize that there is more to life than what we see with our eyes or experience in our flesh.** Though we live in a physical world, there exists another dimension, a spiritual world that is just as real. Behind the events that occur in our physical world are unseen spiritual forces. Since the spiritual world cannot be seen, it is easy to dismiss it. But we must be wiser than that. We must recognize that every earthly issue that we face is really a spiritual issue and must be dealt with as such, “for our struggle is not with flesh and blood” (*Eph. 6:12*).

Second, **we cannot battle spiritual forces in our physical strength.** That is why Paul said, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (*v.10*). Often, we are too confident in our ability to handle situations. But spiritual problems extend beyond our natural limits and, therefore, force us to rely upon the One who can give us supernatural strength.

Third, **we must fight spiritual forces in spiritual ways.** Thus, we cannot fight sin problems with physical solutions, as the natural man does. We must battle sin problems with spiritual solutions. Since we are to face spiritual problems with spiritual solutions, we need spiritual weapons. God has given us those spiritual weapons to wage war in the spiritual world. As Christians, we are often guilty of attempting to solve immaterial problems with material weapons. That is foolishness.

Daily Reflection

Paul instructed us to be strong in the Lord, but how? “By taking up the full armor of God” (*v.13*). When the enemy bombards us with lies, **stand firm** by putting on the belt of truth (*v.14*). Let us be mindful of what God says. When the enemy lures us with temptation or shames us with guilt, **let us stand firm** and remind him of the righteousness that we have in Christ (breastplate). When we run across other combatants or casualties, let us be ready to share the gospel (*v.15*, shoes of peace). When the enemy launches his flaming arrows of doubt, regret, uncertainty, despair, defeat, depression, or hopelessness, **let us stand firm** behind the “shield of faith” (*v.16*). Let us be confident in our salvation through Christ (helmet, *v. 17*) and use God’s Word (our sword) to tear down the enemy’s strongholds. One could also make the case that prayer is a mighty spiritual weapon (*v.18*).

Let us stand firm in God’s power and with His armor, and we will prevail and experience victory in this war!

Our Secret Weapon

September 20 – Ephesians 6:18-24

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Day 262 – 103 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We reached the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It has been packed full of incredible reminders, important doctrine, and challenging thoughts. We should not expect anything less in his conclusion.

Today, Paul exhorted us to pray (v.18). **While prayer was not a part of the armor, it is our secret weapon in the spiritual war (v.10-17).** We should be in the spirit of prayer when we assemble our armor, when we wield our sword (God's Word), and when we enter the battle.

Paul challenged us to "pray at all times," not periodically, but habitually (v.18). He told us to pray "in the Spirit," knowing that since we are in a spiritual war, we must be equipped and empowered with spiritual strength (v.18). To pray in the Spirit, we must surrender our minds, bodies, and feeble abilities to God, to use as He wills. Memorized, ritualistic, or rote prayers are meaningless and powerless against our enemy. **Our prayers must be frequent ("at all times"), focused ("be on the alert"), and fervent ("with all perseverance"). Prayer is not a one-time act but a way of life, a state of mind, an activity that never ends.**

Next, Paul shared the objects of our prayer — "all the saints" (v.18). The word *saints* refers to all Christians. While we should pray for ourselves, we must not forget to pray for others. Remember, we are in a war. One soldier cannot resist an invading army on his own. War is a team effort. It is good that each of us are spiritually prepared for battle, but our forces (the church) are only as capable to wage war as our teammates are spiritually prepared and equipped. **We must pray for the spiritual soldiers around us, that they will be ready, willing, and able to engage the enemy.** They must be able to trust our preparedness, and we must be able to trust theirs.

Next, Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him (v.19). But notice what he requested. Though he is in prison in Rome (3:1), Paul did not ask for people to pray for his release, for his life, or even for his well-being. Instead, he asked that people pray for boldness to share the gospel when he had opportunities (v.20). How convicting! How often do we pray for our health, for deliverance from our "chains," or for God's blessing on our lives, instead of praying for boldness to share Christ with others?

Notice that Paul never called himself a prisoner of Rome or Caesar, but rather he called himself an ambassador of Christ, a prisoner of God (v.20). Having said that, he recognized that even amid dire physical circumstances there was work to be done, people to be saved, and good to be accomplished.

Finally, so that the Ephesians would be informed of his situation, Paul sent Tychichus to them (v.21, 22). It was Tychichus who probably carried the letter to the church at Ephesus. Paul did not want the Ephesians to be fearful for him, but rather he wanted to comfort and encourage them, as his concluding words indicated. He wrote, "Peace, love, faith, and grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus" (v.23, 24).

Daily Reflection

How is your prayer life? Are you "on the alert, praying at all times in the Spirit with all perseverance?"

If prayer is a weapon, then prayerless people are unarmed and vulnerable in the eyes of the enemy. Don't let that be you.

The Root and the Fruit

September 21 – Colossians 1:1-12

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Day 263 – 102 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned from *Ephesians* to *Colossians*, another letter that Paul wrote in Rome (4:18). Colossae was a city near Laodicea in southwest Asia Minor. Most likely, this church was started by Epaphras, one of Paul's associates (*Col. 1:7; 4:12, 13; Acts 19*). Epaphras was concerned about the strange doctrines that were infiltrating the church, so he journeyed to Rome to meet with Paul. Though Paul had never visited Colossae, when he was informed of the situation, he sent this letter to encourage them.

Before getting to the heart of his letter, Paul commended the Colossians for their faith and love (v.3-8). He was thankful that the gospel was bearing fruit in them as it had done in other churches. However, they were being confronted with deceitful doctrines which were confusing them regarding the truths of the gospel (2:8). His response was to pray (v.9).

First, Paul prayed that they might be "filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (v.9). Considering the deceitful doctrines that were confronting the Colossians, spiritual wisdom and understanding were two necessary elements. **Paul was praying for them to grasp the truths of the gospel so that they could grow in the truths of the gospel.**

Second, Paul prayed, "That you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, **bearing fruit in every good work...**" (v.10). The Lord gives us wisdom and understanding so that we can know better how to please Him. We are to live lives that are consistent with the faith that we proclaim.

Notice that to please the Lord we are **"to bear fruit in every good work"** (v.10). Also, notice that which pleases God is to increase in our knowledge of Him. The best way to increase our knowledge of God is to study the words of God. Spiritual growth has little chance without the water of God's Word. How can we know what

pleases Him if we don't know what He expects? How can we walk in a manner worthy if we ignore the instruction manual of God's Word?

Third, Paul prayed that the Colossians would be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might" (v.11). The Christian life cannot be lived in the flesh. It is a supplied life lived by the strength of the Spirit. We cannot endure in our strength, nor can we persevere through trials with will power. Withstanding spiritual assaults requires spiritual weapons.

Finally, Paul prayed that the Colossians would "joyously give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (v.12). This thought is not completed until the next two verses (v.13, 14), but Paul didn't want them to forget what God had done in their salvation. Forgetfulness is evidence of ungratefulness.

Daily Reflection

Paul wrote, **"The gospel, which has come to you, is constantly bearing fruit and increasing even as it has been doing in you"** (v.6). Note two points here. First, God is using His people to advance the gospel in the world. The gospel came to us not only so that we could be saved but also so that we could be part of His work to save others. God's work includes us, but it does not end with us.

Second, salvation is only the beginning of the Christian life, not the end. **Once the seed of salvation takes root, it should give evidence of its presence by bearing fruit.** Our lives should begin to reflect the character and cause of Christ, His desires, His goals, His thoughts, and His words. **Not only will there be fruit in our lives, but also that fruit will increase.**

If someone reported to Paul about your faith in Christ and the fruit that you exhibit, what would he be told? Is there evidence in your life that Christ is at work? Is there fruit? Is it increasing?

Under New Ownership

September 22 – Colossians 1:13, 14

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Day 264 – 101 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

There have been a few times that we have only focused on two verses (i.e., *Rom. 1:16, 17*). Today was such a day. Such incredible truths are contained in *Colossians 1:13, 14*, that they demand we stop and consider them.

These two verses belong to Paul's prayer for the Colossians (v.9-12). They are an explanation of his petition that they may be "joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (v.12). What does it mean that the Father qualified us? What is our inheritance, and who are "the saints in light"?

Paul used the word *qualified* for a specific reason. False teachers were convincing the Colossians that they were disqualifying themselves for various reasons (2:16, 18, 20-23). However, Paul wanted them to understand that **those whom Christ has qualified no man could disqualify**. To qualify means to "make sufficient, to empower, or to authorize." Before coming to Christ, we are only qualified to receive God's wrath and judgment, the just penalty for our sinful state. However, **because of Christ's work on the cross, we have been qualified to receive God's forgiveness**.

Now that we have been qualified by Christ, we have been made heirs with Him, and our inheritance awaits us in heaven (*Eph. 1:11; Col. 3:24*). What is our inheritance? It is eternal life with God, but there's more. Our inheritance also includes the spiritual blessings that God has promised us regarding our salvation.

"The saints in light" refer to the followers of Christ. Throughout the Bible, there is a theme of light and darkness. Light refers to the Kingdom of God and darkness the Kingdom of Satan. For example, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (*Jn. 8:12*).

So, what happens to a follower of Christ in salvation? He is "rescued from the domain of darkness" (Satan's control) and "transferred to the Kingdom of the beloved Son" of God (v.13). Those who are outside of Christ remain under the rule of Satan and his evil forces. They are entombed in darkness, without hope and joy. They are deceived by a world of lies, so they cannot comprehend the truth (*1 Cor. 2:14*). They have no power to escape Satan's control. They are trapped behind enemy lines. They are destined to pay the penalty for their sin, which is to face God's wrath and judgment and to be separated from His favor for eternity.

The only way to be saved from that hopeless state is to be rescued by someone more powerful than Satan, someone who can break into his kingdom, repel his authority, and defeat his forces. The only person capable of these heroic acts is God Himself, which He did for us through His Son Jesus. However, to rescue slaves from Satan's rank required a high price, a ransom of a life for a life. The sinless Lord Jesus sacrificed Himself to pay that ransom (*Mk. 10:45*), to redeem us from the control of the evil one. As a result, Christ exchanged His righteousness for our sinfulness and took the penalty of God's wrath upon Himself.

Daily Reflection

We have been transferred from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of Light. **We are under new ownership, new management, and new rules.** One of those rules is that these things have already been done, and they cannot be reversed. **We are forever free from the enemy's domain. From now on, we will enjoy the light of the Lord.** We have been bought with a price — Christ's substitutionary death — and we are no longer our own (*1 Cor. 6:19, 20*). Now, we live for Him. As Paul encouraged the Colossians to do, let us "joyously give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" and never forget the price that was paid for our redemption!

The Incomparable Christ

September 23 – Colossians 1:15-23

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Day 265 – 100 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul wrote *Colossians* to confront the heretical doctrines of the false teachers. Evidently, these distortionists were promoting the lie that Jesus was just a man or an angel, but certainly not God in the flesh. That's why Paul wrote, "It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him" (v.19). His explanation describes Jesus' relationship to God, to creation, to angels, and to the Church.

First, what is Jesus' relationship to God? "He is the image of the invisible God..." (v.15). Since God is Spirit, He is invisible to the human eye. Thus, **Jesus is God in human form**. He said Himself, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father..." (*Jn. 14:9*). Jesus is God in the flesh.

So then, what is Jesus' relationship to creation? "He is the firstborn of all creation" (v.15). Was Jesus created? No. Paul wrote, "By Him all things were created" (v.16). How can Jesus be both created and the Creator? The firstborn in a family was the highest-ranking child, the primary heir of a father's wealth. To use the term *firstborn* was to signify supreme position. Thus, **Jesus is not part of creation, but rather He is superior to it, above it, ruler over it**. Paul wrote, "He (Jesus) is before all things..." (v.17).

Third, what is Jesus' relationship to the angels? If Jesus is the Creator, then how can he be an angel? Paul wrote, "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth..." (v.16). **Jesus, who is God, is above the angels**. Not only that, but "All things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (v.16, 17). Jesus existed before creation (He is eternal). He was the agent of creation (through Him), the goal of creation (for Him), meaning it was all for His glory, and the Sustainer of creation (in Him all things hold together). The false teachers were attempting to discount Jesus, but Paul shot holes in their teaching. Jesus is not an angel. He is God in human form.

Finally, Paul established the superiority of Christ regarding the Church (v.18). The Church is comprised of the followers of Christ and takes its lead from Him. We worship Him, obey Him, and pattern our lives after Him. The Church pursues His mission. **He is the head, not us**.

Daily Reflection

The point of Paul's list is "so that Jesus will come to have first place in everything" (v.18). Despite the attempt of these false teachers to point out the insufficiencies of Christ, there are none. **There is no one like Him, and there never will be**. He is the Creator of all things, above all things, and sufficient to do all the things He has promised, including save us from our sins and grant us everlasting life (v.20-22).

A key word to note is *fleshly* (v.22). This word gives us an indication that one of the heresies that Paul was confronting was Gnosticism. One of the tenets of Gnosticism was that Jesus was a spirit being and was not crucified in the flesh. His death was an illusion. But Paul made sure that the Colossians understood that Jesus was human, like them, and died in the flesh.

To close, Paul added one of his complicated *if* statements, "If you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." (v.23). This statement does not suggest that believers must maintain their salvation or that they can lose it. Rather Paul was indicating that true conversion is marked by continuance in the faith. One might profess to follow Christ, but the real test is perseverance in their faith.

While all Christians may struggle or backslide at times, those who are true followers of Christ will return to Him. Those who fall away and never return are false converts. **If they have been transferred to the kingdom of God's Son, who will enslave them again in the kingdom of darkness (v.13)? No one. The incomparable Christ can (and will) keep those who are His**.