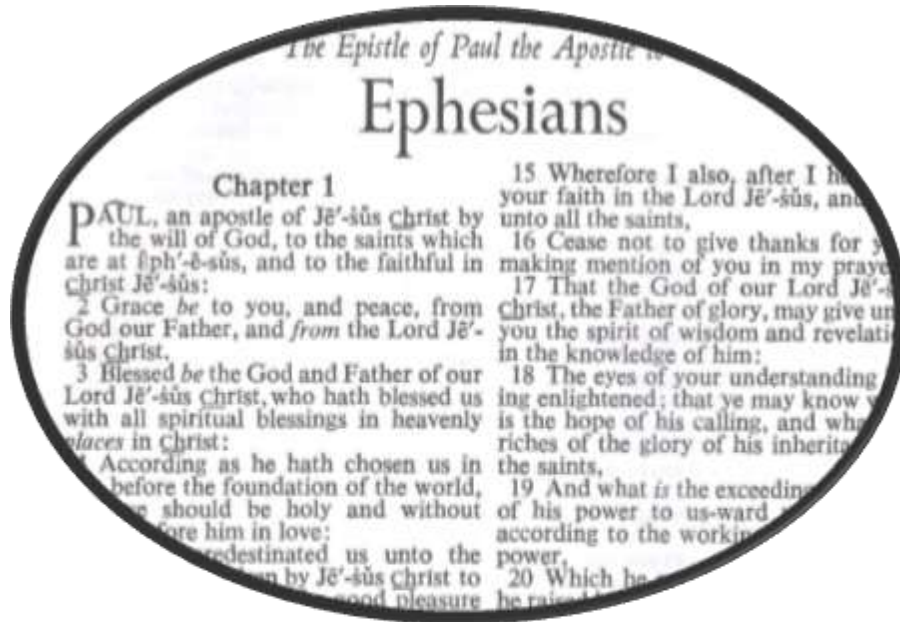


# EPHESIANS – WEEK 6

## THE FULL LIFE IN CHRIST



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Ephesians 5:14–6:4 – The Full Life in Christ*

We need to wake up and get busy; we don't have time to waste because the days are evil. We need to walk circumspectly, which means discerning the Lord's will and obeying it with joy and in song.

Most importantly, we are to submit to one another. Those who are being submitted to must not abuse their authority but, in stark contrast, make those under them happy about it.

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T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

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Ephesians 5:14–6:4 – The Full Life in Christ

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1 Ephesians 5:14b–16 (NKJV)

*Therefore He says:*

*“Awake, you who sleep,  
Arise from the dead,  
And Christ will give you light.”*

*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

This comes as an odd twist after all the preceding admonishment to put off the old self and put on the new and to walk as light, as Christ walked, without even a hint of immorality.

*Therefore, we’re to wake up and arise from the dead. How’s that?*

Well, the American revival in the 1730s & 40s was known as The Great Awakening for a reason. Describing modern Christians as needing to wake up or even arise from the dead is a reasonable metaphor. We sure could use a great awakening right about now. Apparently, the Ephesian Christians could use one too.

But there’s a bigger point at the end of this passage. Why do the Ephesians need to redeem *the time, because the days are evil*? What does Paul mean by, “*the days are evil*”? What does it mean to redeem time?

Paul is saying that they live in an age of evil. Historians agree; this Roman era was known for many things, but not for righteousness. Ephesus was particularly hedonistic.

Thus, the Ephesian Christians need to be extra careful. *Redeeming the time* here just means not wasting it.

*See then that you walk circumspectly. Don’t lose focus, and don’t lose time.*

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Evil days are upon us again. We know this, but we don’t think of it in terms of redeeming the time. We should; the situation is urgent. That’s what redeeming the time is all about. We don’t have time to waste.

This is frustrating. Christians complain about all the terrible things going on, but they rarely do anything about it.

And if they do something, it’s often political activity. Politics isn’t the answer.

Don’t get me wrong; there’s nothing wrong with getting involved in politics. It’s just that political victories aren’t the long term answer. Just look at the ultimate political victory – Emperor Constantine’s conversion. Instead of being a great deliverance, it virtually ended the church’s rapid growth period.

The answer is the gospel. We desperately need a revival. Pray for one. We don’t have time to waste.

2 Ephesians 5:17–21 (NKJV)

*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.*

Ephesians 5:12–21 is all one long sentence in Greek. In yesterday’s portion Paul said, “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.*” Here Paul finishes the point by telling us what being wise means. It’s understanding *what the will of the Lord is*.

That’s a key concept. Don’t confuse secular wisdom with spiritual wisdom. There’s nothing wrong with secular wisdom – things like, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” That’s excellent, but limited, advice.

Secular wisdom will keep you from losing money or doing other dumb things, but it won’t keep you from devoting your life to a meaningless cause. It’s like the line – “I don’t know where we’re going, but we’re making great time.” Spiritual wisdom gets you going in the right direction.

Okay, but how do I figure out *what the will of the Lord is*? The rest of this passage answers that question.

At first, this might look like a somewhat disconnected list of specifics. It’s not. Paul begins with one warning – avoid getting drunk – and then paints a gorgeous picture of life in Christ.

Drunkenness is amazingly efficient at separating someone from God’s will. As we noted yesterday, you don’t want to lose focus. Nothing makes you lose focus like being drunk.

But note that not getting drunk is easier nowadays than it was in the first century. We have clean water to drink, and if we want to partake of the grape, we know the alcohol concentration. Not so back then. “Wine” was preferred because it was sanitary, but you had to watch yourself because it might be strong. Paul’s warning here is good advice, for us as well as the Ephesians, but it was harder for them to follow.

The rest of the passage describes life *filled with the Spirit*. Notice that it’s principally about attitude – how we speak to one another, how we sing, giving thanks to God. It even mentions the melodies in our hearts.

Lastly, it mentions *submitting to one another*. This is an essential part of life in Christ – so essential that Paul will stay on this theme through the next four lessons.

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This portrait of life in Christ is filled with happiness. Life in Christ is supposed to be fun. That’s curious because of all the warnings about suffering and persecution.

But Paul models this well. He suffered plenty, yet his joy never waned. When he tells the Ephesians to speak lovingly and to sing thankfully, no one can reply, “Then how come you don’t do that?”

3 Ephesians 5:22–25 (NKJV)

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*

I always try to work in a math lesson whenever I can. So, I used to play a lunch game with our son, Joshua. It's called, "You cut, I choose." (Or I cut, you choose.) We'd cook up a box of macaroni and cheese mix and add some meat to bulk it up. Joshua would divide the food into two bowls, but I got to pick which bowl was mine – thus guaranteeing a fair allocation. It's a clever math-hack.

Being fair isn't easy with two people. You get a lot of tie votes, which can turn into battles of strength.

Today's passage is similarly clever. It could be called, "You decide, I win." (Or I decide, you win.)

Unfortunately, it loses something in the translation. The command, "Husbands, *love* your wives," is actually, in Greek, "Husbands, *agape* your wives." Agape is loosely translated as love, but it really means sacrifice for. In other words, the husband gets to decide, but he's commanded to favor his wife.

This works marvelously in practice. My wife understands that in any matter of simple preference, she gets to pick. She generally gets her way but trusts me to decide when some other factor is more important than simple preference.

She also knows that her needs are favored over mine when the decision is at that level.

Needs get priority over preferences. Safety gets priority over needs. I get to decide which is which, but that's rarely a tough call. It's a beautiful system.

People shouldn't struggle with this passage. It's just a clever math-hack.

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There's an amusing application of this, which comes up whenever my wife and I go on a long drive. I'm driving, but she has the smartphone with all the map and traffic apps. She tells me what's going on, and I act on her recommendation. So, who's in command?

Google. How scary is that?

Just kidding, but this shows how things can work well together when the roles are clearly defined.

Today's passage is the quintessential marriage advice. It's the secret to a happy marriage – from the guy who invented marriage. Just imagine if the Lord had chosen to keep silent on this issue, leaving couples to fight it out.

Thank God He didn't.

4 Ephesians 5:25–33 (NKJV)

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak of Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Just in case anyone wants to go soft on the meaning of *agape* in the command for husbands to *love your wives*, Paul adds, “*just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.*” That’s total sacrifice.

But it doesn’t stop there. In another (you guessed it) purpose construct Paul gives a new perspective on the point of Christ giving Himself for the church. It’s *that He might sanctify and cleanse her.*

Then, in yet another purpose construct, Paul tells us that the sanctifying and cleansing are so *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

That’s the endpoint of the whole thing? That’s where the universe is headed? That’s the ultimate purpose of the cross and of the gospel?

Apparently so. What a fantastic vision this is. Everything is leading up to some spectacular end-time event where the church will be involved in a ceremony. Christ will *present her to Himself.*

We have a tradition where I work. When a guy gets all dressed up and looks great, we like to needle him by saying, “His lawyer says he cleans up real good.” Here Paul says that about the whole church. Christ’s love transforms this ragamuffin gang into something that can be presented *not having spot or wrinkle.*

And, as it just so happens, Christ *is* our lawyer.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/paraclete/>

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We keep returning to this concept that we’re each a part of a great whole. We get to go to heaven, but the point is the church being *holy and without blemish.* That’s what Christ will present.

So, we shouldn’t think about our life goals in terms of where we should go, but where the church should go. Think team goals, even as you set your personal goals.

Whether planning projects, evangelism, prayer, financial giving, or even your quiet time consider how your activities fit into the grand plan of making Christ’s church glorious.

5 Ephesians 6:1–4 (NKJV)

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”*

*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

This is the same math-hack as the one for marriage. Parents obviously *agape* their children. Children should recognize and appreciate this. If they don't, they're only ruining their own lives. In yet another purpose construct, Paul says they should obey their parents for the purpose *that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth*. That's a promise.

We've all seen this go wrong and watched in horror as a child deliberately makes big mistakes. The last sentence in this passage is advice on how to prevent that. Self-destructive behavior is often rooted in rebellion. To prevent this, parents must *not provoke your children to wrath*. That wrath starts a process that leads to destruction.

Instead, parents should *bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*. The key word here is *training*. Don't just teach your children about Jesus, train them to follow Him.

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A big part of what's wrong with Christianity today is that we confuse teaching with training. We teach people all about Jesus, but we never train them to practice His kingship. Jesus said, “Follow me,” not, “Study me.”

Almost all current Christian education is about doctrine. Doctrine is important and useful, but it's only part of following Christ. We memorize stacks of truths about Christ and then don't do anything about it. It's like learning to swim by reading books. You can only get so far. You have to get in the water.

The first Christians turned the world upside down, even though they couldn't possibly have had their doctrine worked out as well as we do. The letters that would eventually become the New Testament were only starting to trickle in. And it's not like they could just run off a hundred copies on a Xerox machine either. The information spread slowly. Meanwhile, Christianity spread like wildfire. The Christians blew people away with their actions. They loved, they sang, and most importantly, they endured torture. They acted like they knew it was all true.

Conversely, we have the benefit of centuries of great minds sorting out the details of doctrine. That could be a wonderful gift, if we'd only realize what it does and does not do for us.

At the Fellowship of Ailbe, we are investigating producing a more complete curriculum – one which will train people in all aspects of discipleship, tentatively defined as: Confession, Doctrine, Disciplines, Worship, Charity, Evangelism, Servant Leadership, and Restoring the World.

Please pray for us. Ask God to direct us down the path He desires, not the path we think is right.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How should Churches deal with politics?
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is singing important?
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What's your favorite marriage advice?
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are your church's plans for the future?
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What doctrines are absolutely essential?

*Items for prayer:*