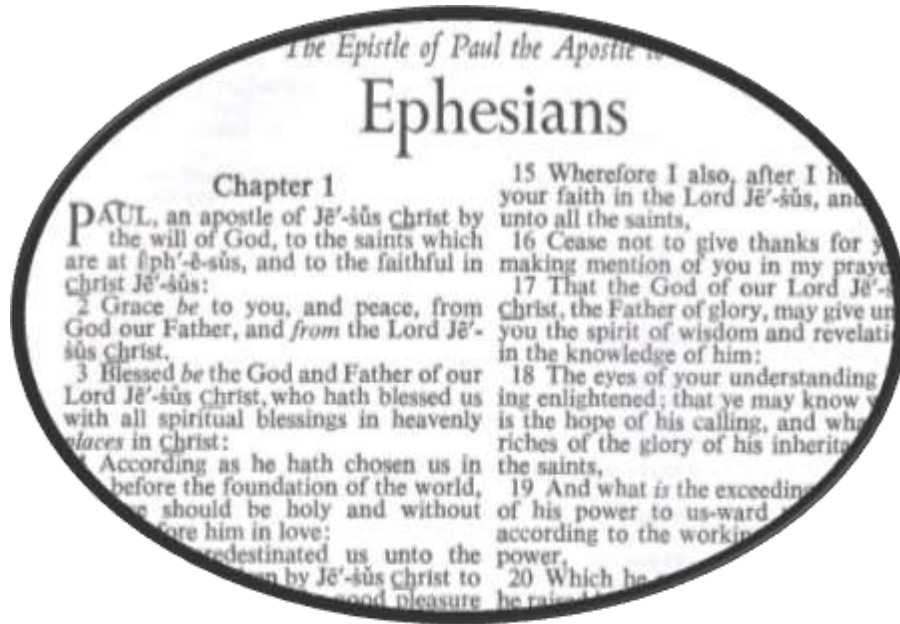


# EPHESIANS – WEEK 7

## THE OTHER KINGDOM



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Ephesians 6:5–24 – The Other Kingdom*

Paul finishes this magnificent epistle with an emphasis on the heavenly perspective on life. Masters are seen in the same light as their slaves – and are expected to act according to the same standard. Our battle is not an earthly one and our weapons aren't earthly either. We must use the armor of God, not our own weapons if we are to survive the battle. And prayer in the spirit is a must.

Finally, Paul closes out with a love-letter style closing. After all, that's what this is.

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Ephesians 6:5–24 – The Other Kingdom

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1 Ephesians 6:5–9 (ESV)

*Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.*

Paul’s charge here is abnormal. It goes against all the traditions and expectations for both bondservants (or slaves) and their masters. While first century Ephesian servitude in may not have been as nasty as it was in antebellum America, it certainly wasn’t anything like what Paul is describing here.

Paul’s instructions to bondservants is so extreme, it’s hard to imagine anyone following them. He tells them to stop pretending to be obedient and start actually being obedient *with a sincere heart*. They’re not to just look like they’re obeying so as to please people. That’s what, “*not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers,*” means.

Paul adds an incentive to inspire slaves to meet this challenge – the Lord will make it worth their while. But the bigger incentive is that not obeying your master is not *doing the will of God*. In addition to being bondservants of an earthly master, you’re supposed to be *bondservants of Christ*. So, act like it.

But if Paul’s challenge to slaves is extreme, his challenge to their masters is off the charts. *Masters, do the same to them*. What the heck does that mean?

To Paul, masters aren’t any different than slaves. That’s what he’s getting at when he says, “*whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.*”

He’s trying to get them to think in terms of the kingdom of heaven.

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The equivalence between bondservants and their masters is one of the key distinguishing characteristics of Christianity. If you want to know if someone understands the kingdom of heaven, watch how they treat different status people. If they treat everyone equally, they get it.

Don’t overinterpret this. There are some ways that different people should be treated differently. Our job isn’t to buck the system or to put ourselves in danger; it’s to see everyone as created in the image of God.

*All men are created equal.* – The Declaration of Independence

That doesn’t mean we’re all the same height. We’re all the same in terms of what we are – human.

Treat everyone with equal dignity. This is one of the foundations of evangelism. We’re citizens of another kingdom, and we alert people to its existence by doing things that make them wonder.

2 Ephesians 6:10–13 (NKJV)

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

Paul shifts gears here. This time, his point isn't about what the Ephesians should do, or why they should do it. His point is that they're incapable. The only chance they have is *in the power of His might*.

The problem is much more than the things Paul said previously: drowsiness, drunkenness, thanklessness, lack of submissiveness. The problem is that they have an intimidating enemy. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

They don't even know what that means! No one can fully know just how powerful these *rulers of the darkness* are. All they can know is that they're no match for them. So Paul tells them to *put on the whole armor of God*.

The word 'armor' is an analogy. Note that Paul doesn't say that this armor will allow the Ephesians to win, only that they'll survive. Defeating the *rulers of the darkness* is God's business, not ours.

In fact, this is another purpose construct in the Greek. They should *take up the whole armor of God*, for the purpose that they *may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*. This has the sense of standing your ground (as opposed to retreating or being overrun).

They'll be left standing. That's enough.

That's the purpose of putting on the whole armor of God.

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Of course, this same lesson applies to us. Don't kid yourself, you're no match for the powers of darkness. That's part of why all those safety margins Paul talked about are so important.

The enemy has, literally, thousands of years of experience in the art of temptation and deception. Depending on our own wits is a prescription for failure. We have visions of great things like Charlie Daniels defeating the devil in a fiddling contest. That's silly. Great victories are accomplished by glorious things like the cross, not by simple people like you and me.

What we need to do is depend on Christ and use the tools he has given us. That's how we keep from being overrun by the Devil's forces.

Not losing is a win in this war.

3 Ephesians 6:14–17 (NIV)

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

The enemy is not regular flesh and blood, so the armor is not regular armor. Paul describes this by drawing analogies with parts of standard Roman armor. The analogy details aren't important. The point is what tools to take up.

Paul begins with truth and righteousness. These are the underpinnings of Christian practice. Next is *the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*. How does *the gospel of peace* make the Ephesians ready? And ready for what?

Answering the second question first, it makes them ready for the attacks from *the evil one*. That helps answer the first question. *The gospel of peace* makes them ready for attacks by keeping them from panicking. This is a familiar concept in first century warfare. That's why Paul included the words, "*of peace.*" The peace the gospel gives is useful, even crucial, when one is under attack.

Faith is the key to stopping *the flaming arrows of the evil one*. By flaming arrows, Paul means attacks. These often take the form of accusations, since Satan is the great accuser (see Revelation 12:10).

The helmet of salvation is the security of knowing one's destiny. This stops the other main type of attack – direct assaults on their salvation. Instead of attacking behavior by accusation, Satan often attacks faith directly by sowing doubt. This is important enough that John wrote an entire letter to address it.

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* – 1 John 5:13 (NIV)

The one offensive weapon comes last – *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*. Sometimes the best defense is a good offense. In Matthew 4, Jesus hit back at Satan three times saying, "*It is written.*"

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* – Matthew 4:10 (NIV)

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This list of weapons and their purpose highlights the nature of spiritual warfare. Modern Christians don't think about that enough. We tend to interpret trials and tribulations through secular eyes. The idea that there might be supernatural origins behind events often doesn't even cross our minds.

If it did, we'd be scared by it. We've already discussed how the enemy is a lot more powerful than we are. The thought of going up against such an overwhelming adversary is intimidating.

But ignorance is not bliss. We are up against a big enemy. Cling to Christ or get crushed.

4 Ephesians 6:18–20 (NIV)

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

This passage spawns one of the classic Bible questions. How do you *pray in the Spirit*? It's a classic because it isn't easy to describe.

But it is easy to describe what it's not. If you know exactly what you want to say and then you say it, that's not praying in the spirit. That's just you praying.

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.* – Romans 8:26 (NIV)

This is a portrait of the spirit stepping in when we're stuck. So is praying in the spirit being stuck?

It could be, but Romans 8:26 is broader. It says, "weakness," not, "stuck." Praying in the spirit is the opposite of taking command and saying some well-crafted prayer. It's being weak and letting the spirit drive. God knows our needs better than we do.

*Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* – Matthew 6:8b (NIV)

So, it makes sense to be flexible and humble while praying, letting unexpected things happen.

And we're supposed to do this *on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*. That is, pray in the Spirit all the time. That means making this kind of prayer your norm.

*With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.* Then Paul boldly asks for prayer for himself.

He needs it.

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Unpredictable prayer is exciting. We think we "know" what we need, but we're often wrong. We should *on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests* allow our prayers to be redirected by the Holy Spirit.

This happens (at least to me) more often with desperate prayers. I plead and scream but end up realizing that my prayers have shifted. I look back thinking, "How'd that happen?" But of course, I know.

I doubt it's the desperation that causes the Holy Spirit to take over. I think it's that desperate prayers are longer. Short prayers don't leave room for much action. Long prayers are different.

*Always keep on praying.*

5 Ephesians 6:21–24 (NKJV)

*But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts.*

*Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.*

Paul closes with a personal note. This is, after all, a letter to dear friends. He knows that the emperor might have him killed at any moment. Paul can't know whether this letter will be his last.

But a note at the end of letter isn't good enough of a personal update. He needs to send someone who can answer questions. Tychicus is the perfect one for the job.

Paul's omission of personal details is curious, even prescient. It's as if Paul knew that his letters would be much more than letters. This epistle contains many things of great, enduring value. The personal words at the end are beautiful but brief.

By using Tychicus to communicate the details of his affairs, Paul keeps this epistle shorter than it might have been. His other epistles are similarly shortened. The result is a New Testament that isn't laden with things that wouldn't be relevant centuries later.

This is yet another way that the Bible feels inspired.

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Paul's inspired closing is a clinic in how to write from the heart. He seems totally comfortable in his own skin. He knows that the Ephesians are worried about him. So, he doesn't shrink for saying that when they, "know our affairs," that will, "comfort your hearts." Paul's real humility eliminates the need for false humility.

That gives weight and power to his final paragraph. *Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.*

This must have sent a tingle up the spine of the people who read it. Imagine using that as an email signature line. Could it work? Or are words like this only appropriate within a romantic relationship?

That's the point. This conclusion sounds like something a soldier would write home to his wife.

But Paul can pull this off because of his incredibly sincere heart. He can write to the Ephesians in the language of a love letter because that's how he lives his life. Few, if any, of us function at that level.

Still, that's the goal. Real Christian koinonia has this level of intensity, even intimacy. That's the level of intimacy that sheep have with their shepherd too.

