

QUEEN OF THE EPISTLES 10: THE ARMOUR OF GOD
1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-13 / EPHESIANS 6
2026-03-08

We'll wrap up our series today: The Queen of the Epistles. The over-all theme of Ephesians. is **the unity of all humanity** in Christ **and God's purpose for the world** through the church. The great secret **revealed to** Paul is the love, mercy and grace of God weren't just for Jews but for all.

The ancient world had its barriers. But in Christ these barriers are down. It's God's design that all people and nations should be one in Christ. Christ is depending on us to tell of Him.

To live a life worthy of the calling we've received, worthy of His adopting you, we must "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Obliterate self.

There's one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of all. We live in a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, God-filled world. The Church has been organized with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers so each of us can be fully equipped—so we can become what we ought to be, **and the body of Christ is built up** into perfect unity—to be Christ-like. To do that, we need to leave our old way of life and turn to Christ's way. Put off our sins and put on the righteousness God wants to give us. How do you do that? Stop lying. Get rid of self-righteous anger (but be angry about injustices to others, like Jesus was. Don't steal—have something to give away to those who are poorer. "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit them.*" Don't grieve the Holy Spirit, the guide to life.

On the add side: "*Be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" Be imitators of God—especially with respect to the love and the forgiveness of God.

Paul contrasts the life of the believer v. the unbeliever. The life of the unbeliever is lived in darkness. The life of the one who trusts in Jesus is lived in the light. Those without Jesus are dark; those who trust in Him are light. We should keep in mind at all times. Unbelievers don't see what we see, hear what we hear or perceive/process as we do.

The light produces good fruit—including benevolence, righteousness and truth. The light which Christ brings makes us strong to do what we know to be true. It enables us to discern what is pleasing to God from what is not pleasing to Him. The light exposes evil. But Christ's light doesn't just condemn; it heals. And so Paul urges us to redeem the time given to us.

The early Church was a singing and a thankful church. Give thanks for all things in all places at all times. Are you over-flowing with joy of singing and gratitude for all that God gives and does for you? How amazing that God's love has stooped to save each of us and that we're in His hands! Finally, the Church was and is a place where there is great respect and honour for each other. And that comes from us being revered by Christ—we are to see each other in the light of Christ.

And, we got into Paul's understanding of marriage, with the controversial word that a wife is to submit to her husband. "*The husband is the head of the wife*", is quoted in isolation. We looked at how horrendous things were for women in Jewish, Greek and Roman society. By comparison, this was indeed the gold standard by far. But I missed one of the essential points. We don't want to submit to just anyone. The whole world is aggravated about submitting to arbitrary American tariffs that they have been burdened with, including of course, Canada. But that's not the kind of submission here. It's a submission to Christ, not based on control or domination, but love. What Christian wouldn't joyfully submit to Christ, knowing the lavish, limitless love He pours on us. That's the highest privilege. It's that kind of love Paul says a husband must bear his wife. It must be sacrificial love. He must love her as Christ loves the Church—ready to make any sacrifice for her good. The whole relationship is in the Lord.

As much as the Christian faith did for women, it did even more for children. The Roman father had unlimited power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, even make them work in his fields in chains. He could punish as he chose and even invoke the death penalty. This power lasted as long as the father lived. True, it was seldom carried to its limits, but it existed. When a child was born it was placed at the father's feet. The father could either pick it up, acknowledging he wished it to be kept, or he could walk away and the child could literally be thrown out. As with other societies, the risk of being thrown out was greater for girls than boys. Unwanted children were often left in the Roman forum where they became the property of anyone who picked them up, in order to sell them as slaves or stock the brothels of Rome. Ooh! Finally, in such an environment, you can imagine the plight of weak or sickly children.

Paul says children should obey the commandment and honour their parents. He also tells fathers to not provoke or discourage their children, thereby discouraging them. We know all too well that the plague of youth is a broken spirit, brought on by continuous criticism and rebuke and uber strict discipline, with much severity and too little tenderness. Restricting a child for too many years stifles growth to healthy independence. Too much trust is better than too much control. Encouragement does more than rebuke can ever do.

Then we get to this strange and horribly misused passage: "*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect (trembling) and fear...just as you would obey Christ.*" This verse was flaunted in justifying the entire slave trade, from African capture to outrageous treatment in the American south and elsewhere. Once again, context is important. There were an estimated 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire. So, while we might say why is slavery even spoken of in the Bible—should it not be obliterated. For sure! But the Bible always speaks with the

practical reality of its time. There were so many slaves because during Paul's time a terrible idleness had fallen on the citizens of Rome. It was beneath the dignity of a Roman citizen to work, so practically all work was done by slaves. Even doctors and teachers, even the closest friends of the Emperors, their secretaries who dealt with letters and appeals and finance were slaves. So, unlike our understanding of slavery, bonds of deepest loyalty and affection often existed between master and slave.

That said, the life of a slave could be grim and terrible, for in law he was a thing, not a person. Cato's advice on slaves is when they're old, they must be thrown out to starve. "When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations." The master possessed the power of life and death over a slave.

Paul tells them to be Christian where they are. Where God sets us is where we live out the Christian life. Reflect on your blessing. Christianity doesn't offer us an escape from circumstances; it offers us conquest of circumstances. Any slave's work is to be done in the awareness that God's eye is on them. If we were to consider this instruction today for the worker, we can draw this from it: the secret to good workmanship is to do it for God. That says a lot: the problems of the world are not one step economic, but religious. Even the master of men (the boss) is still the servant of God and is answerable to Him as well.

So, to the armour of God. Paul closes the epistle thinking of the greatness of the struggle that lies before the people. It's worth noting that the people of the time believed implicitly in evil spirits who filled the air and were intent on harm. "*Powers, authorities, rulers*" are all names for different classes of these evil spirits. To Paul, the whole universe was a battleground, where spiritual forces were fighting against God. Though we may think of ourselves as more astute, the picture is really no different for us.

Paul himself was chained to a Roman soldier as he wrote this. So this is a real word picture. The soldier's armour was right in front of him and he translates it into Christian terms.

There is the belt of truth from which his sword hung and which gave him freedom of movement. We are able to move freely and quickly because we know the truth.

There is the breastplate of righteousness. When/as we are clothed in righteousness, we are impregnable. You can't effectively defend yourself against accusations with words, but you can with your good life. We can live in such a way as to prove another's accusations are a lie.

There are the sandals—the sign of one equipped and ready to move—eager to be on the way to share the Gospel with those who have not heard it.

There is the shield. He uses the word, not for the small round shield, but for the great oblong shield which the heavily armed warrior wore. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the fiery dart with its tip dipped in pitch which was set

alight. The great oblong shield was made of two sections of wood glued together. As the dart sank into the wood the flame was extinguished. Faith deals with the darts of temptation. Faith is always a complete trust in Christ. When we walk close with Christ, we are safe from temptation.

There is salvation for a helmet. The salvation which is in Christ gives us forgiveness for the sins in our past and the strength to conquer/defeat sin in the days to come.

There is the sword—this is the word of God. It is both our weapon of defence against sin and our weapon of attack against the sins of the world. We can never win God's battles without God's book.

And the greatest weapon of all—prayer. It must be constant. We tend to pray only/more intensely in the great crises of life. But daily prayer provides daily strength. Prayer demands the concentration of every faculty upon God. I am too guilty of every distraction! And, the prayer must be unselfish. Let's get to more about others and less about us. Jesus reminds us so clearly, "Your will (not mine) be done. Prayer is not easy. Paul doesn't ask for comfort or peace, but that he may be allowed, emboldened to proclaim God's secret—His love for all. We need to uphold our hands in prayer.

Paul closes with a blessing—with all the great words again. The peace which was a man's highest good, the faith which was complete resting in Christ, the grace which was the remarkable free gift of God—he calls these things down upon his friends. Above all he prays for love that they may know the love of God and may love others as God loves them—with an undying love of Christ. But the greatest of these is love.