

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Letter to the Ephesians

Readings: *Ephesians 1:1-6:24*

Reflections:

- Letter to the Ephesians: The letter to Ephesians was most likely a circular letter written to the churches of Asia Minor (see all the churches listed at the beginning of the book of Revelation) and this letter probably became associated with Ephesus because it was the capital of that region (note it is the first city listed in Revelations). Ephesians is Paul's summary of his life teachings and is carefully distilled in its content. The style of Greek is dense. Without doubt Paul used a scribe to capture this content. Some believe that this letter was written in memory of Paul rather than by Paul but it is more likely a letter written while he was in prison and simply accompanied the other two letters of Colossians and Philemon. Paul organizes his content around three physical images: Sit, Walk, and Stand. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, secured in his authority and love. We must learn to walk worthy of this high calling. We must mature until we can stand in the spiritual battles of life.
- Salutation: Paul's opening is rather standard. Many manuscripts do not have "in Ephesus" underscoring the likelihood that this was a circular letter.
- Revelation of God's mercy – Praise for God's grace: Paul begins by praising God for the way he has blessed us. Paul points out that we all have a heavenly bank account that makes us rich beyond our wildest dreams. God has given all of us everything we need in life to be filled with joy and purpose. He has given us a completely blameless standing before him – we are perfect in his sight. Therefore we have no barrier whatsoever between us and God. We don't need religion to clean us up or help us get right with God. He has adopted us as his children. Sons were the ones that received the inheritance in that culture and so Paul states that both men and women are all treated as children of inheritance. He did all of this by forgiving us through the shed blood of Christ. Again we see the centrality of the sacrificial death of Jesus for us. God also did something very important. He revealed his will to us – Jesus is now in charge of everything. This gives us confidence that no matter what happens, we can trust Jesus because he is in charge. This means we don't have to be our own rescuers. We can trust Jesus to rescue us from our own sin and self-centeredness. We can also trust him to rescue us from any threat we face here and now. He is Lord of all! This declaration is the key to having peace and living in submitted relationship with Jesus.

- Hope in Christ is sealed: As we align with Jesus, we bring glory to God. It is important to know that we were chosen in Christ, rather than chosen to be in Christ. In other words, all those who believe are chosen to bring God glory. I don't believe Paul is saying that God chooses some and rejects others. John 3:16 says God loves everyone and responds to those who believe in him. We participate in God's sovereign will as we respond by faith to Jesus. Now Paul walks through how someone believes. We hear the word of truth, the great news of Jesus, and then we have faith. As we respond in faith, God seals our lives by pouring his Holy Spirit into our lives. This portion of God's presence in our lives, his Spirit in us, is his down payment that he owns us entirely!
- Christ's power and position: Paul now writes out his prayer explaining how he is praying for these churches. His first prayer is for them to receive the Spirit of wisdom (the right way to look at things) and revelation (really getting God) so that they can increasingly get to know God better. It takes a while to grow into an intimate relationship with God and so we need to keep praying for each other to keep growing deeper in our understanding of him. Now as we get to know him Paul prays that we come to know the hope we have in Christ, our wealth and his incomparably great power. In other words, as you get to really know God through the revelation of God's Spirit in your life, you find out that you are completely set! You need to have no worries about the future (we have a certain hope), no fear about any need (we are stinking rich) and no concern about vulnerability (we got the power). Paul now expands on this power that is ours through Jesus. This power is God's resurrection power. It is the power that makes dead things alive. It is the power that does the impossible. It is the power that triumphed over all the works of the enemy and evil and took Christ and seated him in the heavenly realms in that seat of ultimate authority at the right hand of God. This is the same seat Satan apparently wanted to grab by his own greed and power. Jesus through his sacrificial submission and humility was the one who truly attained it. God modeled for all of us in Jesus how to achieve true power and security. It is through humility and submission.
- Raised from spiritual death: Paul now talks through the spiritual transformation all of us who follow Jesus have gone through. We were all dead in our sin. We were all under the influence of the enemy. We were all self-centered, self-indulgent and self-destructive. We were objects of his wrath, we were living as his enemies. Yet God loved us and models for us what true enemy love is. Through Jesus he forgave us, poured out his grace on us, and saved us from this disaster we were heading towards. This amazing demonstration of his love and mercy reveals for the entire spiritual realm just how incredible his love and mercy is.
- Grace to live righteously: The fact that we are dust/dirt, totally screwed up, completely sinful creates the contrast to show just how over the top his grace and mercy is. Therefore we can't boast. Humble gratitude is the only response we can offer up. Now does that leave us as worthless people? No, we are recreated in Christ as his masterpieces and empowered to do amazing things for his glory. All of this is mapped out for us and so we don't even have to try to think something up for our lives. God has his plan and we just got to stick with it.

We aren't loved because we do good things for God but we do good things through God's strength because he loves us!

- **Barrier broken:** Paul now makes it crystal clear that all divides in humanity are removed in Christ. He uses the Jew and Gentile division as his example but as we see in Galatians 3:28 there is no male or female, no Jew or Gentile, no slave or free. All gender, race and class divisions are made one in Christ. This unity is made real through the work of the Spirit that unifies us as one in the common love, community and mission of Christ.
- **Christ as the cornerstone:** Paul uses the image of the temple (possibly calling to memory the story of the Spirit being poured out at Pentecost and the sign of tongues being given to demonstrate the inclusion of the entire world in the new family of God) and how we are all unified before God to serve as house of prayer for the nations. Christ is that cornerstone that the rest of the building aligns to. Everything we do individually and communally must align with Jesus as we are built together in organization, beauty and purpose.
- **Revelation of former mystery:** Paul is about to pray and then pauses to share his own story. In this entire first section we see Paul modeling for us what a true spiritual parent does for those he or she owns in Christ. He talks them through who Jesus is, what Jesus accomplished, and what that means for our lives. He also helps us see how our story fits in with God's story as well as sharing his own story and how he personally experienced this same transformation before Christ. Ultimately Paul prays for those he owns and keeps praying and investing until they come to maturity in Christ. Prayer is what links the spiritual parent figure, God and the person who is being invested in. In a sense, the parent figure or spiritual shepherd is bridging the gap between God and the person by sharing their heart, journey, and understanding as well as interceding through prayer. Paul shares his own journey again and how God let him in on the secret that everyone is equally being welcomed into God's presence to be changed from the inside out. What an awesome inside secret to find out! What an incredible mystery to solve!
- **Wisdom seen in church:** Paul continues his own story and reminds his readers of his very low position, "the least of all God's people" – note, if God can use Paul the least of all people, he surely can do something awesome with you! Paul gives his readers his own personal mission statement. Every Christ-follower should continue to seek God until they have a personal sense of how they can advance the mission of Christ. Paul then puts his own mission within the context of God's larger mission: God is revealing through the gathering of his kingdom citizens (called the church) to reveal to the spiritual realm what God is all about (humility, grace, inclusive community) and that we can all just be friends with God without any religion. What an awesome mission to take to the world! When we see how amazing this mission is, the issue of suffering is put in proper context and so Paul encourages them not to worry about his suffering. God is in control and this suffering is a part of God revealing his glory in and through us.

- **Prayer for strength:** Paul now moves into the second part of his prayer for his children. He now prays for them to be filled with the power of the Spirit that they might experience the limitless love of God for them and as they are completely drenched in the love of God, that they will be filled to fullness of God. In other words, the power and the love we experience through the Spirit do everything that religion can never do! It changes us from the inside out to be truly like God! This is the new heart of flesh that replaces our heart of stone (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26). This whole process of resting in God's love and being filled to the fullness of his presence is what it means to be seated in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Like a little baby born into royalty, we sit on the lap of our Father King and we are simply held and loved. The entire kingdom is ours, all the royal treasury is ours, the King's army is at our disposal, but at this point in our lives, all we are like are little babies that need to be loved and held by our Father.
- **Praise to God:** Paul concludes with an awesome promise. Whatever we think God can accomplish is shooting too low. God will take all of our prayers, hopes and dreams and show us that he can do exceedingly, abundantly, and immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine. This is the complete WOW factor of living in intimate friendship with the creator of the universe. God blows us away because it is all a part of the plan to revealing the majesty of his glory!!!
- **Exhortation regarding the church - unity among saints:** We now move from sitting with our Father to learn how to walk worthy of this high calling of being children of a King. We are like toddlers leaving the Father's lap to jump down and discover the love and security of his family. The NIV translation translates the Greek, "I urge you to walk a walk worthy of this high calling" as "I urge you to live a life worthy of this high calling". It captures the sense of putting this love into action but it misses the imagery of sit, walk, and stand. This walk is characterized by love: humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another. Paul then points out that to really live this new life we must live in unity within the larger family. God's heart is all about unity in his family and so if we want to embrace the life God has for us, we must embrace his family. We must remember that all God ever wanted was one, big happy family. One Lord, one faith, one baptism... one, one, one! There is no place for lone rangers or rebels. If you want to be close to God you have to completely embrace his family.
- **Gifts for achieving unity:** Now to each person in his family God has a special place and a special grace. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to describe how Jesus came as a rescuer, saved us by capturing us out of our disaster, and led us back to his home land as a conquering king giving out gifts to everyone to celebrate his victory. It is an awesome image! Paul inserts here how Jesus basically went to the deepest depths of hell and raised us all up to the highest heights. It is not just the people who were alive at the time of Jesus but also all people who had lived who were in the depths of the grave that were rescued by Jesus. Those great friends of God, Abraham, Tamar, Moses, Ruth, David, Elijah and so many more were all rescued as we were. We look back to Jesus even as they looked forward. So Jesus has it all covered. He is the ultimate king, rescuer and Lord. Now from this position of ultimate power, it was Jesus who

sets up the spiritual leadership of his kingdom. Paul outlines the basic kinds of leaders Jesus puts in place. Apostles (or sent ones) are the key point leaders over the mission and organization of the church. They are the ones who suffer the most as they oversee and lead the entire church. Prophets speak the heart of God and work closely with the apostles to keep everything on track. They keep the standard high and they ensure that everything is established by two witnesses. The apostles are not lone rangers but must work in mutual submission with the prophets. In a sense, these are expressions of God's mom and dad heart of the collective church family. Evangelists are those that are empowered by God to get the message out there. Pastors and teachers are those that work within the church family to care for people and help them grow to maturity. These all work together to build up the church and get everyone within community growing to maturity and moving intentionally towards the purposes of Christ. Our spiritual growth to maturity is not something we attain individually but is set in the context of coming to maturity within a family context. We see how being filled with love leads to the "fullness of God" and here how living in interdependent community enables us to experience that love as we each do our part and this results in us attaining the "fullness of Christ". God wants us to become complete in him and in Christ. We need the Spirit to change us from the inside out. We also need the community around us to partner with the Spirit to enable us to live out the full experience of being changed from the inside out. Now we must note as well, that as we are changed from the inside out, the very first thing God does is make sure we are secure in a family-style experience of community. Like children, we learn best how to walk and talk in a family of brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles who are all there helping us at every turn.

- Exhortation regarding personal righteousness – renounce sensuality: Paul now begins to explain the next very important step in being changed from the inside out. This is the process of renewing your mind. The first step in renewing your mind is to intentionally identify the way the culture around you shaped your mental habits and what feels like "normal" to you. If we do not get an objective perspective on our culture and how people live around us, our culture will always feel like what is normal to us. In Paul's culture, like western culture, it was all about sensual indulgence, feeling good as much as possible all the time.
- Renew holiness: Here is Paul's basic process of renewing your mind (also see Romans 12:1-3). Make Jesus your total source of truth. Intentionally abandon or put off old mental habits and lifestyle patterns, intentionally develop new mental habits based on truth, and then actively live out new lifestyle patterns. Our brains are designed to automate. Our brains are designed to hard wire our thought processes to make things easier for us (like riding a bike or keyboarding). The more emotional the experience, the faster it hardwires. This is why abuse is so damaging and drugs so addictive so instantly. Once something is hardwired, it becomes a permanent mental habit that feels like "normal" to us. The more we live in that hardwiring, the more permanent it becomes. Now here is the key. You can't unwire your brain. You can't unlearn how to ride a bike. This is why people can't unlearn how to be depressed or unlearn addictions. All you can do is as Paul indicates in this passage. You

adopt a new mental source for truth, abandon the old, and then do the work to develop the new mental habit that in time will become the new pattern for your thinking. Mental habits are best developed in loving community (Paul has already covered this) and by actively, practically living in line with the new mental pattern (this is what Paul is outlining right now). This renewing of the mind is the second important step in being changed from the inside out. It is vital that we are secure in God's love and are surrounded by loving community before we tackle renewing our minds. If we attempt to transform our thinking without dealing with our inherent insecurities and fears, we will really struggle to follow through.

- Discard unrighteousness: The first sentence of this paragraph should really be grouped with the previous paragraph. In the Greek it is a transitional verse that really is the concluding statement to the previous paragraph. "Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body." In other words, a key part to the renewing of our minds is the role that community plays in speaking the truth in love to us as we actively choose to develop mental habits that are rooted in the truth found in Jesus. The rest of this paragraph up to Ephesians 5:2 is focused on one of the big areas we humans need, the renewal of our minds and lifestyle. It is the whole issue of anger. Paul starts this section by quoting Psalm 4:4. Anger as an emotion in and of itself is not sin but what we do with this emotion can easily lead us into sin and can easily become a mental rut or habit that has the power to destroy relationships. Paul's first caution is to be preventative to allowing an anger-based mindset to take root. Deal with offenses immediately and don't ruminate on that overnight. As we choose to be judgmental and angry rather than confront the person in love to see reconciliation, we allow the enemy to develop a foothold in our mind. He digs in and sets up camp. Paul now gives a list of many anger-based actions that tend to flow from anger. He starts with stealing. People can feel that life has ripped them off and so they have a right to take things that simply aren't those to take. This was particularly true in a culture with slaves who would be tempted to steal from their masters as in the case of Onesimus and Philemon. Paul may have had this example in mind even as he wrote this. He then mentions unwholesome talk. People who have anger-based mental habits almost always are verbally abusive, judgmental and tear people down. In both of these cases, Paul encourages these readers to not simply stop stealing or being verbally critical or accusing but be active in replacing those behaviors with positive, Christ-inspired actions. People shouldn't steal but work hard so they have things to give away. People shouldn't be mouthing off but rather looking for ways to build others up. Trying "not to sin" is a sure fire way to ensure you keep falling back into old sinful habits. We must actively embrace a new way of thinking and acting if we are going to renew our minds and develop new mental habits. When we fail to embrace this new approach to life, we grieve the Spirit of God within us, that down payment God has placed in our lives. Rather than disappoint or make the Spirit sad, we should seek to please the Spirit of Christ within us. Paul goes on to list a longer list of anger-based actions we should replace with new loving ways of relating: rage, brawling, slander, and malice. We should intentionally seek to be kind and compassionate. Now here is the key to our inner transformation: We must forgive as Christ forgave us. This

is how we break the power of sin in our thought lives. We don't forgive and show love because other people deserve it. We forgive and offer our enemies love because Jesus deserves it. We don't look to people to seek our basis for forgiveness, mercy, grace or love. If we do we will always be deeply disappointed and only become angrier. We must look to Jesus and find in him all the reason to offer forgiveness. He has offered us forgiveness that is so rich and complete, how can we do anything but actively forgive others around us? That is what he calls us to do!

- Imitate God in love: Paul concludes this section on anger with this simple challenge. Imitate God, your father and love as he loved you. How did he love you? Look at Jesus. He laid his life down for you. Remember the great sacrifice Jesus paid for you and that will be your motivation to offer forgiveness to others. Now people sometimes ask if you can forgive people who don't ask for forgiveness. It is important to make a distinction between offering someone forgiveness, even if it is just in your heart, and being reconciled to someone. The other person must want to be reconciled for that to happen. You can still offer forgiveness even if the other person doesn't want it or think she/he needs it. Forgiveness is ultimately a gift we give ourselves as it frees us from becoming an angry and bitter person.
- Be morally pure: Paul moves on to his second big mental habit issue that most people, especially men, have. This is self-indulgence, particularly sexual indulgence. Paul again makes a long list of the ways we indulge ourselves – sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, and rude or sexual joking. Our mental habits find ways of expressing themselves and Paul again challenges us to replace these old patterns with new Christ-centered patterns of thinking, living and talking. Paul warns that some people treat these issues lightly but we should not be deceived that people who live self-centered lives lose their inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. There is an awesome inheritance but like Esau we must be careful not to lose our inheritance because we sold it for a moment of complete self-centered indulgence. The immorality of the Roman Empire (remember it was really bad) was worthy of God's wrath. We should take warning ourselves within North America, yes?
- Walk as children of light: Just as Paul gave a key insight into how to deal with anger, he now gives a key insight into how to deal with habitual self-indulgence. We must first bring all of our self-indulgence into the light of loving community. Rather than sneaking cookies in the dark, we must be honest within community about our patterns of self-indulgence. Alcoholics Anonymous has found this to be completely true. We must then discover what pleases the Lord. Those who are perpetually focused on pleasing themselves must trade that in for seeking to please the Lord first and foremost. Once we do both of this, exposing the fruitless deeds (nothing good comes from our self-indulgence), we are ready to experience God's transformation. The normal pattern is that people feel ashamed to talk about what they do to gratify themselves in secret. This is often called shame-based addiction. In Christ-centered community, we don't need to be held hostage to shame or fear. Paul points out that everything exposed by light becomes a light. NIV translators miss the point on this one as they translate it: "Everything exposed by the light becomes visible." That is not Paul's

point. The Greek literally says, everything exposed by light becomes a light. In other words, the moon is a completely dead and lightless object. Yet when it is brought into the light of the sun, then it becomes a light to those living in the dark of night. Paul now mentions a part of a song that apparently they would know. It is a song that emphasizes the resurrection power of Christ within us to awaken us, raise us up from our spiritually dead condition and to experience his light shining on our lives.

- Live Spirit-filled lives: Paul wraps up this section on renewing the mind by some final exhortations. Be wise. Make the most of every opportunity. Renewing the mind takes constant, consistent effort. It must be rooted in embracing God's will for our lives. Paul's final encouragement? Don't party getting drunk but be constantly, continually filled up with the Spirit. The power of God changing us from the inside out is foundational to us renewing our minds to think like Christ and live like Christ. As we do this, we must embrace a true party atmosphere within the church community. Paul says we should crank up the music, get the party going and start to live life the way God intended, as one, big, happy family. This positive, joyful community is the best environment for people to develop new mental, emotional and lifestyle habits. Living in isolation, depression and discouragement is the best way to remain stuck in patterns of defeat and hopelessness. Paul says to us don't let that happen. Work together at partying and it will make the inside out change, both heart and head way easier for everyone. God's way is truly the best way.
- Exhortation regarding relationships – mutual submission: Here we have another transitional verse. Paul ends the list of activities God's family should be doing on a regular basis with the encouragement to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This sets up his whole next section that focuses on relationships. Unless we are secure in love, grounded in community and have developed healthy mental, emotional and lifestyle habits, we are going to have a very hard time in intimate relationships. The foundation for solid mutually loving and submissive relationships within homes and the work place is being changed from the inside out. If we are struggling in our relationships, the starting point is not to focus on the relationship but to go back through the process of being changed by God outlined in Ephesians 1 to 4. Paul's basic counsel regarding all relationships is to have Christ as your role model, inspiration and reference point for every relationship. Don't respond to the person or the role they play in your life without first finding out exactly how the truth and love found in Jesus speaks into this relationship. Paul starts with husbands and wives. Wives are to submit, serve and love their husbands as the church loves Christ. This is the goal and ideal. Now many Roman lists of rules for households called wives to serve and submit to their husbands. What comes next is shocking. Husbands are to love their wives and be willing to lay down their lives as Christ laid down his life for the church. Paul goes into great detail about everything the husband is supposed to do for his wife. This was revolutionary in his day. It portrayed a kind of intimacy with God as well as a kind of radical service from husbands to their wives that was revolutionary to the Roman culture. We see the power of love within these intimate relationships to transform the other spouse. Again this is the goal and ideal. Now we should note that from 1 Corinthians 7 at times this idea doesn't work out

because only one spouse is a true believer in Christ. Sometimes one spouse is only a Christ-follower in name and as a result rejects and wounds the other spouse. We need to be cautious not to set up a type of legalism that says that the teachings of Jesus results in one spouse being given the freedom to treat the other spouse terribly and the spouse who is suffering should simply quietly submit to this harsh or unloving treatment in isolation. At times like this, community should gather around and seek to lovingly support the spouse and marriage. Each situation will need a case by case response but we know from the rest of Ephesians that community and spiritual leadership sets a vital context for our household relationships.

- Parent-child relationships: Paul moves on to parents and children. The command to honor parents is life-long and so we should remember that we are to honor them at all stages of life. We should also note that the primary responsibility for discipleship of children is their parents. The term “fathers” in this context should be translated “parents” as this was how it was used within the Greek. Again we see that we are to make Jesus the center of every relationship. Parents should not use their power to demoralize or exasperate their children but rather they should seek to be led by Christ to help their children become the very best version of themselves.
- Master-servant attitudes: Slaves or servants were also a part of their households. Again, Paul may have had the experience of Onesimus and Philemon in the back of his mind as he wrote this. Again masters should take their cues on how to treat servants from Jesus, their master and to whom we all have become servants. Servants should treat their masters like they do Christ. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Paul is a one note song. This is another key to being changed from the inside out. Rather than seeking to do what is right based on external motivation – reward and punishment, Paul is always challenging his readers to seek to find true internal motivation by focusing on Jesus. As we fix our eyes on Jesus and our ears on his voice, his love will start to compel us to serve and love others even in some of the toughest circumstances.
- Exhortation regarding relationship with god – spiritual struggles: Paul now comes to the final part of his three part plan for spiritual growth. We are called to sit enthroned with Christ as his love through the Spirit gives us a new heart and foundation for our lives. His perfect love casts out fear and enables us to live completely secure in him. Then we are called to walk worthy of this high calling. This means living in community, receiving from spiritual leaders, renewing our minds, dealing with destructive mental habits and lifestyle patterns, and growing mutually loving and submissive relationships. The final phase is to grow to the place where you can take up position on the frontlines in the mission of God and stand your ground in the midst of spiritual battles and struggles. This final phase is about standing strong in the battle of the kingdom. Paul begins by saying that our true strength and power is in the Lord, we are in and of ourselves weak. Yet in Christ we have all the power of Christ showing itself to be perfect and complete in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). He then encourages us to put on the full armor of God. Before outlining the armor, he reminds

his readers that our battle is not against other people. We are called to love our human enemies knowing that they are deeply loved by God. We are called to fight a spiritual battle against spiritual enemies. As we reflect on Jesus' ministry, time after time he took on spiritual enemies even while he was demonstrating love and respect for those considered enemies by the religious leaders. Paul then states we need the full armor of God to stand our ground when the spiritual battle gets the worst. Paul was in prison and was probably looking at a Roman soldier as he was writing this. So what is our armor? Truth (the truth found in Jesus) is what comes first. Embrace truth whenever you hear it and then everything will be held together. Righteousness is given as a gift in response to our simple trust in Jesus. It protects our hearts and keeps us secure in our relationship with God even when the enemy wants to throw his lies at us. The Great News (Gospel) of peace is what gives us confidence to get on the move and when things get tough to stand our ground even when faced with suffering. The Great News gives us peace with God and with others and ourselves. It keeps us grounded and ready to move when wherever our commander calls us. On top of this basic protection we are called to shield our faith. Our complete trust in Christ enables us to block the lies and attacks of the enemy that would wound our hearts or tempt us to give up. The helmet of salvation again protects our minds and is a sign of our victory. Our salvation is something we can hang on to again to ensure we remain secure before the enemy. The enemy's only real weapon is lies. As we witnessed back in the Garden of Eden, he has no true authority. All he can do is to deceive us because we are actually the ones with the authority. We are the image of the divine, the children of God. We are actually the ones with true authority and so his ploy is to deceive us so that we start to act in ways that are destructive or self-centered. Then his job is done. That is why so many of the pieces of armor described by Paul are all about defending against lies. The final weapon, a small sword used for hand to hand combat is "the sword of the Spirit, the spoken (rhema) word of God." This is the complete sentence: "the sword of the Spirit, the spoken word of God and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." The NIV breaks the sentence at the wrong spot. What Paul is saying is that a very powerful weapon against the enemy is Spirit-led prayer where we speak out the truth of God's word. Just as Paul was praying at the beginning for his readers to come to maturity, he was doing battle spiritually to see them step free from the lies of the enemy and to come to full maturity in Christ. In the parallel letter, Colossians 4:10-17 we see Paul write of Epaphras, "He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured." There is a battle to be waged and won for people through prayer. Paul is saying that this is a key aspect of how we do spiritual battle. When we are united with God this way, the Spirit intercedes through us to accomplish his will in our lives and the lives of the people we own in prayer (see Romans 8:26-27).

- Request for prayer: This call to take the sword of the Spirit leads into Paul asking his readers to take ownership for him and to pray for him. The letter begins by Paul praying for them and ends with him calling them into that place of spiritual maturity where they pray for him. The sign of true maturity is that those who are parented grow up to be like their parents.

Rather than staying dependent, Paul wants his readers to grow up to take the same kind of parental role in praying for others, including him and his team. Paul still needs prayer to overcome his fears. This is encouraging as fear is one of those struggles that many of God's greatest leaders struggle with throughout their lives. Faith is not the absence of fear, but a trust that transcends great fear and doubt. It is a trust that says, not my will but God's be done.

- Further report: Paul explains Tychicus' role in providing a more complete update.
- Benediction: Paul ends with a final simple prayer. Peace. Love. Faith. Grace. All of this flowing to and from Jesus!