

**Ephesians:
God's New Family**

Date	Weekly Theme	
January 7	Ephesians 1	<i>All things belong to God</i>
January 14	Ephesians 2	<i>Radical Grace - People made for a purpose</i>
January 21	Ephesians 3	<i>The Servant Family</i>
January 28	Ephesians 4:1-24	<i>Family Unity</i>
February 4	Ephesians 4:25-6:9	<i>Living a new life</i>
February 11	Ephesians 6:10-24	<i>Family Armor</i>

Small Group Time

Take time to greet each other, share names if necessary, and share your highs, lows, and prayer concerns. Then take time to pray for one another.

Address the following questions:

What are the things that you and I do battle with in our day to day lives?

What are the tools of the Christian warrior as s/he does battle?

What do you personally find helpful?

Questions from last week

Processing the above questions.

- **Be Strong in the Lord, and in His Mighty Power!**
 - Can you hear the strength of St. Paul's exhortation?
 - We as Jesus' people, both as individuals and as community find our foundation and life in the creator of the universe.
 - His power is accessible to us, and when called upon flows through us.
 - In a world full of so much difficulty and of so many battles, we are not without resource.
 - The Lord of creation stands with us!
 - You can't do better than this sort of company!
 - It's truly the best kind to have.
 - He gives us armor with which we can stand in the midst of the onslaughts of the evil one.

- **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**
 - When we feel as though we are under attack, we need to pay attention to just what it is that is attacking us.
 - For example, when I am being attacked by a person, I have to ask myself just what is attacking me.
 - Ex.—The man with the *ISSUE*.
 - The point is that what is coming at us may be carried by a person or persons, but so often the *spirit* of the attack is so much larger than they are.
 - I find this reminder helpful, because in it I am still able to see the one coming at me with a metaphorical knife as a fellow child of God.
 - But back to *The Holy Spirit and Things Spiritual*, and our discussions on the nature of evil, what we are dealing with here has a huge social dynamic.
 - What I mean by this is that it resides not so much in individuals, but rather in social systems that govern and organize and the *spirit* that animates them.
 - *Our struggle is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*
 - At best, we are talking about things that are hard to see and identify.
 - So what are we to do?

- **The Full Armor of God**

- We are not left defenseless in the face of these things.
- God has given us tools.
 - ***The belt of truth.***
 - Truthfulness and clarity and integrity will never be overrated. What they presuppose is that you and I will be able to be honest with ourselves about who we are, what we are experiencing, what pieces of it are ours to deal with, and what pieces belong to others to deal with. This takes immense self-awareness and honesty. It means not lying to ourselves about who we are, what we desire, and what motivates and moves us. It means being conscious.
 - ***The breastplate of righteousness.***
 - Righteousness is blamelessness. It means that your nose is as clean as can be, your house in order, and your debts settled up (emotionally speaking). It means that you get that Red Wood tree out of your own eye before extracting splinters from those of others. This means a life that is centered, and on the main thing—that isn't being frittered away by chasing after so many things that don't matter.
 - Unrighteousness becomes a point of entry for the powers. When your house isn't in order it means a lessened ability to stand your ground when the evil one is knocking. You are essentially off-balance. Any martial artist knows that you can't beat an enemy while off balance. Balance (righteousness) is necessary.
 - ***Feet sheathed in the gospel of peace.***
 - All of these tools are pacifistic in nature.
 - They do not require anyone's murder.
 - We, like Jesus, are called to extend the peace of our Lord to a world that would persecute us and put us to death.
 - This means that wherever we go, we go as constructive, unifying agents, and not destructive, divisive ones.
 - ***The shield of faith.***
 - What the powers and principalities, and the forces of evil want you to believe more than anything else is that death has the last word.
 - If you can be made a fearful person, you will be a person more easily manipulated.
 - Examples?
 - What they need you to believe is that God and his power aren't sufficient to overcome death.
 - ***Which is why faith is such a death blow to the powers.***
 - Faith is simply trust in God...
 - ...that he is sufficient,
 - ...that his love is sufficient,
 - ...that his power is sufficient,
 - ...that his forgiveness is sufficient,
 - ...and that his salvation isn't up for grabs.

- ***The helmet of salvation.***

- It's no coincidence that St. Paul paints a picture of the helmet of salvation.
- We as human beings are plagued with doubts.
- And the biggest doubt we have is related to those issues of faith...
 - ...that God's salvation is a conditional salvation.
- A people who are constantly wondering if they're in or out, if the hammer is going to fall today or tomorrow, and if God's love is conditional. Folks who are plagued like this can never live in the freedom of Christ's love for them.
- And so they live anxiously.
- Anxious people, just like fearful people (anxiety and fear are two sides of the same coin) are people who are off-balance and controllable.
- In their anxiety, they are more likely to serve satanic structures than they are to stand firm in the risen Lord.
- Why? Because the structures seem to provide safety and mitigate against the anxiety and fear.
- But a people who believe with their entire minds that the question of their eternity has already been decided cannot be manipulated with fear and anxiety.

- ***The sword of the Spirit.***

- The last two are the only two offensive weapons in the war chest.
- The sword of the Spirit is the word of God...in this case, solid knowledge of scripture, of God's promises for creation, and of just what it is that God is up to in our midst.
- With it, lies, distortion, and fearful ideas and notions can all be refuted in the light of the Word of God.
 - So for example: Someone tells you that you are worthless and irreparably broken and damaged goods.
 - The word of scripture tells you otherwise. You are a precious child of God, created in his image and loved so much that Christ lived for you, died for you, and rose in forgiveness of you.

- ***Constant prayer.***

- Prayer keeps us centered.
- It keeps us attuned to the spiritual realities around us. In other words...it keeps us alert.
- It keeps us on mission and connected to the God who loves us.
- It keeps us in constant awareness of the nearness of God and his accessibility to us, not just in the time of trial, but in all the stations of life.

Questions for Reflection and Digestion

How do you use these things in your day to day lives?

What pieces of armor are in your tool box that you need to pull out and dust off?

Why?

How might regularly using this available armor change how you experience life?

Questions and Processing
Closing Prayer