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[0:00] Good morning. I have to admit I'm a bit nervous this morning.

! I'm not typically nervous, but for whatever reason I am this morning.! So please forgive me if I seem that way. So we're in Ephesians chapter 6.

And Ephesians has been quite the ride. Ephesians can be very convicting. It can be a very difficult letter.

So this morning I want to make it difficult a little bit more. I want to ask a question. And I asked the same question to myself as I read through this, and as I prayed through this, and as I wrote this.

Are we, our Christians, are we, here in our culture, in this country, in this community, are we counter-cultural?

[1:10] Are we different from our neighbors who are not Christians, who are not believers? Do we live our lives differently than those people around us that we see every day?

I think these are important questions that we need to ask ourselves. And it's definitely something that Paul is telling us throughout this letter to the church at Ephesus.

Ephesians can basically be broken down into two sections. You've got chapters 1 through 3. And Paul has this beautiful theology that he lays out in those first three chapters.

I mean, it's a magnificent work when you think about it. He relates to us the gospel, this mystery that he tells us about. He informs us of a new creation and the coming together of heaven and earth.

There's a New Testament scholar that I follow quite regularly by the name of N.T. or Tom Wright. And he says that he oftentimes wishes that Ephesians was the theology textbook for Christians rather than Romans sometimes because we might live a little bit differently.

[2:28] We might see things differently than we typically do. If we look at Paul's progression in these first three chapters, we can see in chapter 1, verse 10, Paul talks about making the mystery of God's will and purpose known as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him in heaven and things on earth.

In chapter 2, verse 10, he says, For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And then in chapter 3, verse 10, again, there's a theme going. Paul tells us so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

These three verses kind of lay out Paul's theology of this new creation that he writes about in this letter to the church at Ephesus. Then in the second part, in chapters 4 through 6, he lays out how this is applied to the church.

Then and today. Remember I said before in my last sermon, if you were here, that the Bible was written for us, but it wasn't written to us.

[4:07] Now, I borrowed that phrase. That's not my own, so don't think I'm that smart. I borrowed that from an Old Testament scholar by the name of John Walton, whom I read a lot of his work.

And for the last few weeks now, we've been talking about what this new creation, this new life looks like as we live being filled with the Spirit.

We are to live as children of the light, putting away all darkness. We're to put away all falsehood and speak the truth with our neighbors and with one another.

We're to put off our old self, Paul says, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds because we are created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We're also to do things like not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Let all bitterness and wrath, anger and slander be put away from us.

[5:15] All malice to be gone. We're to be kind with one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God and our Messiah Jesus has forgiven each one of us.

In chapter 5, he tells us that we are to be imitators of God, walking in love because Christ gave himself up for each of us, for his church.

We're to put away all sexual immorality, all impurity, all covetousness, because it's not proper for these things to be maintained among the saints, he tells us.

We are to have no filthiness, no foolish talk, no crude joking. We're not to be idolaters. We're to live and believe without not being deceived by false teachers who have empty words and tell lies.

Paul tells us that we are to look carefully how we walk. As Brian told us a couple of weeks ago, not as the unwise, but as wise, making the best use of our time because the days are evil.

[6:32] Do we make the best use of our time in these evil days? This is where he told us that we're to walk in the Spirit. And Brian talked to us about what that looks like a little bit and the way that we are to address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord with our hearts, always giving thanks for everything.

I find that so hard to do sometimes. You know, I want to keep a song in my heart and we all get discouraged from time to time. We all have things that happen to us from time to time.

And it's so hard to sing those songs to the Lord in our heart. But we don't do that alone. We do that through the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit who indwells each of us.

And then he talked about submitting to one another out of reverence for Jesus. That's a hard word for us, isn't it? Submission, submitting to one another.

And then we come to last week's sermon where Father Ife talked to us about the relationship between husbands and wives. In the ancient Roman world, when Paul was writing the New Testament, there were these things that were called household codes.

[8:02] They were instructions to citizens throughout the ancient Roman Empire of requirements that were about the family and it concerned order within the society.

The Roman government, the Roman Empire wanted to order society in the way they felt was right within the Roman Empire's morality.

The main focus were about relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. In Ephesians, Paul is writing a Christian response based upon the new creation of God's order.

How he has ordered the world. And how he says that we are to order our households. Paul writes about here in Ephesians as well as Colossians 3, verse 18 through 4, verse 1.

Peter also mentions this in 1 Peter 2, 13 through 3, 7. In the Roman Empire, men reigned supreme.

[9:15] I hate even having to say that out loud because I know I get the glares. I feel it. I feel it. But the men in the Roman Empire, their word was absolute rule.

Whatever they said, that was the final say-so. I see some finger pointing out there. They could rule with an iron fist. It's sad to say, but they could abuse their children.

They could abuse their slaves. They could abuse their wives. The man's power in the household was absolute and even included the power of life and death.

He could acknowledge the sins of his wife or his slave or his children. He could banish. He could kill and disown his own children without anybody giving a second glance.

There's a story that's recounted by a first century historian of a man who beat his wife to death because she drank his wine. And the neighbors stood by and approved.

[10:28] But the church is called to be different. We're called to be different in our household. We are called to be counter-cultural. The church rejected this ancestral pagan custom.

It rejected the Hellenistic religions of the time. The church preached about a new king, Jesus. And to Roman authorities, that sounded like revolution.

Do we speak about King Jesus today in such a way that our politicians and the culture out there might think that we want revolution?

Christians were very unpopular. And they were persecuted. At first, they were persecuted mostly by the Jewish authorities. And later by the Roman authorities because of their talk of this new king.

In fact, up until Rome caught fire in about A.D. 64, the Christians were mostly persecuted by the Jewish authorities. The Jewish religious leaders.

[11:33] But there was a fire in 64 A.D. And there were rumors about the Roman emperor Nero who set the city on fire.

So what does the good Roman emperor Nero do when people are talking about him setting the fire to destroy the city? Why, he blames this obscure little religion called Christianity.

He used Christians as a scapegoat. What better scapegoat could he have used? These people who were preaching revolution.

They threatened Nero's absolute rule. So in order for Christian families to kind of get along in this society in the Roman Empire while still maintaining some sort of household code, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus to tell them about how these relationships should look in the home based upon his new creation theology.

Now, some have tried to say that this was an apologetic thrust aimed at the Roman authorities. And I think that that's partly true. But I think more simply, this is Paul, through the Holy Spirit, through the power of God, telling Christians how they are to be ordered within the home and how we are to be different than those around us.

[12:55] You see, the man in the house had absolute power in the Roman world. But Paul tells us, as Father Ife said last week, that there was a mutual submission between husband and wife.

Husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loves his church. And wives, though they submit to their husbands, are to respect them. Husbands have the greater responsibility because if they love their wives in the same way that Jesus loves his church, they're willing to give their lives up for them.

Now, this doesn't necessarily mean death. But it might mean that you give up things in your life that were once important to you. But now your wife is the most important person in your life.

This was much different than putting a wife to death because she drank your wine. It was much different than beating her for sport or for fun. Christian husbands were to treat their wives differently than Roman men were allowed to within that society.

And Christian men today are to treat their wives differently than other men in the culture out there. Just as our wives submit to us, we are required to submit to the headship of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[14:14] And in our passage today, Paul says that our children are to obey their parents. He goes on to say that this is the first commandment, and he's quoting the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments here, the first commandment with a promise, and that promise is that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Now, this promise was made to the Israelites and was about them living in the promised land in the Old Testament times. But Paul takes this and he puts his new creation spin on things, this Christian thrust about the meaning of this commandment.

He says that if children, and by the way here he's speaking about younger children who are living in the household. He says that if children obey their parents, then they will live long in the land and things will go well with them.

He's speaking here eschatologically. In other words, if children obey their parents, if they honor their mother and their father as Christ has commanded us to do, then we can find ourselves living in eternity because Jesus has given us eternal life through him.

Now look what he says next. He says, Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

[15:40] By the way, keep in mind here that Paul is telling the household unit how we are to live being filled with the Spirit. Remember, this is all about being filled with God's Holy Spirit.

And because we are filled with that Spirit, we can live like this. We can do these things. It's not through our own power. We don't do anything that is righteous and good in our own power.

It's only through the power of God's Holy Spirit. We can't obey without that Spirit. Fathers aren't to provoke their children to anger, but they are to instruct them, to bring them up.

It's the fathers who, again, have the bigger responsibility here. Do you see how this is kind of working? We have Jesus who is the head, and he had the ultimate responsibility.

He had the ultimate burden. Even though we are to submit to him, he had to die for us. That's what makes this so upside down in the Roman world in those times.

[16:52] This whole counter-cultural movement was just an upside-down way that just blew people's minds. In the ancient world, it was the Father who was responsible for teaching children.

It was the Father who was responsible for bringing them up. In the Jewish tradition, this was all about teaching them about the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament as we call it today, so that

the law of God, the instruction of God, could be written upon their hearts.

This was the responsibility that the Father had in the home, to bring them up in the instruction of the Lord, so that hopefully one day, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that child would have the law of God written on his or her heart.

Then we get to Paul talking about slaves. Some translations say servants. Some translations say bondservant. I prefer the word slave because that's what that word in Greek means.

It's a slave. But it's not the way that we think of slavery. In our country, in the Western world, some 200 years ago, in America and Great Britain, we have a history of slavery.

[18 : 20] In the 1700s and 1800s in the West, slavery was based upon skin color and hate, and it was a huge scar on the Western world in our history.

Now, I come from a Southern Baptist background. That's why I'm trying to keep my voice down a little bit. Otherwise, my Southern Baptist will come out. But in my Southern Baptist background, this is a real bad spot in our history because we used the Bible.

And I say we because I was part of the Southern Baptist tradition. But we used the Bible to say, you know what? God ordained slavery. God said slavery was good because it's in the Bible.

So therefore, we can keep our slaves. We justified slavery based upon God's word. Now, how perverted and wrong can one group of people be?

They would use passages like the one that we read today to say that God is okay with having slaves because it was okay with God in the Old Testament.

[19 : 25] It was okay with God in the New Testament. It must be okay with God now. The Hebrews themselves in the Old Testament were slaves in Egypt. But if we think about this theologically, were we not also slaves?

Prior to God, His saving spirit residing within us? Were we not slaves to sin and to hell and death and the grave?

In the ancient Roman world where Paul writes about slavery, slavery was an economic necessity. I heard the other day a scholar say that it's estimated that in the Roman Empire at any given time, there were between 30 and 50% of all people within the empire who were slaves.

But this was because that there were no bankruptcy courts in the Roman Empire. There were no bill collectors who would send you first, second, third, and final notices in the mail.

And so if you went bankrupt in the ancient world, then slavery was how you paid off your debts.

Slaves became members of your household.

[20 : 39] If you owned slaves, they were in your household. You were responsible for them, but you were also the absolute authority and power over them as well.

Your life was not your own. You belonged to another person. Just like women and children, slaves could also be beaten and killed, and nobody would say a word.

You were property. This was the common denominator of slavery in the ancient world and slavery 200 years ago in our Western culture. Human property.

But Paul is speaking to Christians and telling them to be counter-cultural. He's not here trying to end slavery because slavery was just the context of the society.

But he is saying that they are part of your household and you are to be different as a Christian in the Spirit of God than other people in that culture.

[21 : 40] He tells slaves to obey their masters with fear and trembling, but with a sincere heart as you would to Christ. Don't be people pleasers. Don't go through the motions, but sincerely work as if you are working for Jesus.

In Colossians 3, Paul writes much the same thing in detail, and he says that when they work, they work as if to the Lord, and then they will receive the inheritance as the reward, the inheritance being from God the Father.

And then Paul addresses the masters. He tells them to stop threatening and that both the master and the slave have a master in heaven who in there is no partiality.

The reference to God as judge. In Colossians 4, Paul says, treat your slaves justly and fairly. Now, I've heard this sermon preached these days, and many preachers will preach this part as we are to be good workers in our jobs.

We're to obey our bosses. And while this is one way to apply this passage, it's not what Paul's meaning was originally. This was about the household and how you treated people within your household.

[22:57] But you can apply this at work. Many of us who do still work, do we work as if to the Lord? Or are we simply going through the motions and being people pleasers?

We are to be light in the darkness. People watch us. It's interesting that, and I found this out recently, in the Roman world, many wealthy families had open homes.

In fact, when the New Testament preachers, the apostles, would preach in some of these places, they would preach in some of these bigger homes where people could gather together.

And in these homes, they were completely open. So anybody passing by on the street could look in your house and see what's going on. Now, that's a little creepy for me, but it did happen.

It did happen. People could see what you were doing. People could see how you were acting.

People could see if there was a difference or not in your household versus their own.

[24:11] So Paul relates this to families to keep in mind what a family should look like. They don't do this to please people, but how men treat their wives, how fathers treat their children, how masters treat their slaves.

If this could be seen, and people would be in the streets looking into your homes, they would talk about Christians and the impact that they would have in that society and how different they are.

And in fact, we do know that this had an impact on the empire. Christianity spread. Through the centuries, people saw that Christians were different.

People saw that Christians were countercultural. People saw the power and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people just like them and how those people could change.

Jesus is our King. We are members of His kingdom. We are to be members of that kingdom and live like members of that kingdom. Live differently than our neighbors.

[25:18] We are to live differently than people that we see doing whatever it is that people do out there nowadays. We see violence in our streets. We see it in homes.

We see it all over the news. We see abortion. We see abuse. We see all kinds of evil. Paul said that the days are evil, but we are to live wisely and make the best use of our time.

That starts in our families. We can't be perfect. We can't have the perfect family. I'm quite certain that nobody in this room today has the perfect family.

But we are to live differently and treat our families differently. Forgiving wrongs in our family. And we can be forgiven wrongs in our family because the blood of Jesus Christ has washed over us in order that forgiveness can take place.

We can be different people. We can be countercultural people because we live in the Spirit. We're to be filled with the Spirit.

[26:36] Really quickly, and I don't want to take up too much more time and I'm almost done, I promise. But how do you get filled with the Spirit? What does that look like?

Anybody gone without food for three, four, five days sometimes? You're hungry. You're starving. You got no energy. You can't work. You can't play. You can't do anything. What do you have to do to get energy back?

You got to eat. You have to eat. You have to be filled with food and with energy. Well, for us, this is our food.

This is how we get filled with the Spirit. We stay in the Word. We stay in prayer. God fills us with the Spirit.

You can leave the Spirit behind. You can say to God, you know what? I'm not going to read your Word. I'm not going to pray. I'm just going to go over here and pity myself and do my own thing and be in the world and be just like everybody else and I can forget all about it.

[27:43] And even if you do it accidentally because, oh, a week's gone by and I haven't read my Bible, two weeks has gone by and I haven't read my Bible, you start getting a little bit like everybody else, don't you?

I know I do. Be filled with the Spirit. The Word of God fills us. We let the Spirit work in our lives.

We need spiritual food. We need to read and to pray and to be with God devotionally by ourselves, with our family, and with our church family.

We need community. Paul says that in order to be different, in order to be counter-cultural, we need to be filled with the Spirit.

It makes us different as individuals and it will make us different as a church. To close, I just want to ask one more time, are you different?

[28 : 45] Are you different than your non-Christian neighbors? Are you different than the world while you're at home? Are you filled with the Spirit so that you can be different in your family, in your community, in your church, in your life?

Are you light in the darkness? And do people see the light? Do people see Jesus when they look at us?

I certainly hope so. Let us pray. Amen. Father, we thank you so much. So much that your son Jesus Christ gave his life on a cross that we might be covered in his blood, forgiven of our sins, and that through his death, burial, and resurrection, we know that we have the hope of a bodily resurrection to be with you forever in eternity.

We thank you, Lord. We ask that you would give us the power of your Holy Spirit, that we would be different in this culture, that we would be the light in the darkness. We thank you, Jesus, in your most precious name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.