



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Ephesians 6:10-13 Part 3

Over the past few weeks, we've been digging through last half of Ephesians 6 where Paul talks about spiritual warfare and what that means for the body of Christ. Now, for many people, this is a well-known section due to its focus on spiritual warfare as it relates to the powers not of this world and the role of the armour of God in the life of Christians. However, what we've learned so far is that even before getting into the armour of God, there is one simple, seemingly unassuming instruction where Paul sets the stage for discipleship and shows what it really means to embrace a life lived for Christ. This call to discipleship is the foundation for everything he's about to teach us as it relates to the armour of God.

Paul starts this call in verse 10 by saying:

Ephesians 6:10, 13b-14a

'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might...having done all to stand. Stand therefore...'

Paul goes on to give the why behind this instruction - that there is a battle going on in the heavens right now and even though we can't see it, it is impacting the physical world all around us. Paul uses the language 'principalities and powers; rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places,' to remind us that there is a whole government of demonic forces at work all around us vying for the ultimate control of humanity. And they aren't just these spiritual thug-type characters either. They are strategic. They are cunning and they are extremely manipulative. Understanding this is imperative because our strength is no match for their strength. On our own, we are powerless against such strategy. But for Christians, as we are called to fight strategy with strategy, Paul now instructs us to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Why? Well, verse 13-14 make it clear:

So that we can stand and not fall prey to the strategy of the evil and wicked forces all around us.

A concept in Christianity that, as we have previously discussed, resembles leaning more than anything. We lean into Christ, much like this 'Christian cactus' instinctively leans towards the light. This leaning...this constant seeking of light and strength from Christ, is at the very heart of discipleship. And at its core, discipleship is about discipline - a reminder that our spiritual journey is governed not by fleeting feelings but by deliberate choices and intentional decisions.

Leading a disciplined life is not an easy journey though. It is one that requires sacrifice and intentionality. True, this is very different from the way of living that the world teaches us to embrace, but it is possible - because it is a life that is lived in the power of His might, not in our own strength. There's a necessary trade-off though in embracing the power of His might instead of the power of our might. It means that our desires and wills must be yielded and submitted towards Him. Understanding this helps us to recognize that what He wants for us is far more important than what we want for us. It's not what I want but what He wants. After all, this is the way of Jesus isn't it? It's exactly what Jesus prayed to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane, on the night that He was betrayed, '...not My will but Yours be done.'

And so we see, that there is a cost to discipleship isn't there? There's an intentionality in choosing to die to self and to live for Christ as we align our wills and desires with Him. It's no surprise that we see this evidently with the 12 disciples don't we? Each one of them was living their own life, when Jesus called them out and invited them to follow Him. Their response was immediate and total - they left their nets and thus their old lives at the shore to follow Him into a new way of living. For the disciples there wasn't even a hint of going back. They didn't have a fall-back in case following Jesus didn't work. He had their everything.

A few years ago we had a baptism campaign, and every single person that was baptized was given a shirt that said, 'not going back.' We have since changed strategies because some of those people actually took it literally and never came back. However, at the time, this was strategic, because as each person was submerged under the water, and came up, the reminder was right there in black and white, that this was the start of a new day - the beginning of a new chapter. The old has gone, and the new has come.

Not going back.

And when you really think about it, this is the essence of what it means to follow Christ. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to move forward with Him, not backward into our old lives. We see this theme play out in Scripture time and again. In Abraham's day, it involved Lot and his family during

the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God saved Lot and his family from the city's destruction, instructing them to keep their eyes forward, towards the fulfillment of God's promises, not backward at their old life in Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, Lot's wife could not resist the temptation to look back, and as she did, she was turned into a pillar of salt. Fast forward 500 years or so to the Israelites in the desert, when faced with uncertainty and hardship, they too were tempted to look back. Unsure of where their next meal was coming from and how they would reach the Promised Land, their hearts began to long for Egypt, where, despite being enslaved, at least they had regular meals.

You see, following Jesus for the modern-day Christian is very similar. Christ has saved us from our old lives of slavery to sin. Although there might be a temptation to look back or casually glance, the simple term 'following Jesus' is a reminder that we are to continually keep in step with Him. He keeps us moving forward - further and further away from our old lives and every step closer to a life lived with Him.

It's a reminder that there is a cost to discipleship isn't it? It's not just lip service, but it's life-lived. Before we even get into the armour (which we will next week - I promise), Paul wants us to know exactly what we're signing up for. It's almost as if he's saying - forget about the armour of God if you're not first willing to count the cost of discipleship. Everything starts there because the armour of God simply serves as one of the tools in our disciplined life of following Jesus.

Jesus addresses this concept specifically in several challenging passages in the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 9:57-62

'Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

59 Then He said to another, "Follow Me."

But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

61 And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."

62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'

And then again shortly after Jesus makes it very clear that:

Luke 14:26-27

'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.'

What do we make of this? Is this truly the cost and sacrifice required to follow Jesus? Why wouldn't Jesus let the man go and bury his father? Why would he not allow another to say goodbye to his family? And then most concerning why would he say that we must hate father and mother...children...brother and sisters....and even our own selves??

Luke 9:57-62 and Luke 14:26-27 both have some very challenging things to say about the cost of discipleship that at first glance can seem incredibly contrary to the heart of the Gospel that teaches us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Add to that, the instruction of taking up ones cross daily to follow Jesus? You and I might understand the connection to the cross and the sacrifice that Jesus made upon it. But because Jesus hadn't died on the cross yet, this connection would not be easily seen. For the first century Christian the cross was a sign of cruelty and punishment. So, how now do we reconcile all of this?

What I think is happening here is simply that Jesus is trying to move people away from an Emotional response to the gospel to an Intentional response to the gospel. And the way that He is doing this is by teaching a re-ordering of priorities.

We see this clearly in the first example in Luke 9 where Jesus and His disciples had been travelling around Galilee, preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, healing the sick and casting out demons. It was absolutely revolutionary for the people of the first century to witness this.

And one of those people runs up to Jesus and exclaims that he will follow Him wherever He goes - which is a great and noble thing to say. But it raises the question, has he thought it through? Does he know what he's committing to, or is he just caught up in the moment? Jesus is omniscient and knows everything about this man and his response shows us the deepest recesses of this mans heart.

Jesus responds by saying: 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' Which is strategic. Foxes and birds were all over the area at that time. Remember when Samson grabbed a dozen foxes, tied them by their tails, lit them on fire and let them loose in the field? That's because foxes were all over the area. People would often trip over their holes and farmers hated having them dig up their crops to make their dens. Birds were also

very common and had nests all over the place. So foxes and birds and their dens and nests were common to the people of the first century and in Jesus example here, He uses them to represent the comforts of life. It seems to me that this man wants to follow Jesus but also likes his comfortable lifestyle. Jesus' response serves as a litmus test for the man's motives, questioning whether his commitment is contingent on maintaining a comfortable lifestyle or if he is truly ready to forsake his comforts for the sake of the Kingdom.

The next person says I want to follow you but I need to go bury my father first. Which is a good and noble thing to say and do. Why didn't Jesus just allow him to go ahead to bury his father? Well, because there likely wasn't even a dead body at his house. Think about it. In the hot climate of the Middle East, with no way of preserving the body, immediate burial of the deceased was required otherwise the rate of decomposition would be multiplied exponentially. The fact that this man was with the crowds, witnessing Jesus' miracles and now receiving the direct call from Jesus Himself to follow Him, suggests that his father is not in fact dead, and that his request to let him bury his father was simply a delay because he did not want to commit. You see, in the first century, the phrase, 'I need to bury my father,' was commonly understood to mean waiting until the father had passed away and then settling his estate, which could be a prolonged process that was also tied to receiving the inheritance. Following Jesus would mean abandoning that potential inheritance. He would love to follow Jesus, but it would have to be on his terms, not Jesus'. And so, the man's statement, while outwardly respectable and noble, actually masked a deeper reluctance to give up earthly security for the sake of following Jesus fully and immediately.

So, now we come to the third example where the individual asked to go home and say farewell to his family and friends. Again, this seems like a perfectly acceptable request but Jesus response indicates otherwise. He says, 'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' This request to say goodbye, much like the delay requested for a father's burial, indicates a potential hesitancy. It reflects a reluctance to embrace fully the sacrifices required in leaving everything to follow Christ. The hesitation can be interpreted not just as a polite deferment but as a significant risk that once home, the pressures and attachments there might persuade him to abandon his decision to follow Jesus.

Jesus' response also now brings further clarity to the call to follow Jesus as we saw with Sodom and Gomorrah and the Israelites - that following Him requires an unconditional, unwavering commitment that prioritizes His kingdom above all else.

Which now can begin to bring a little bit more clarity to Jesus words a few chapters later in Luke

where He tells the same people that they cannot follow Him unless they first hate their father, mother, brothers, sisters...family...

In these interactions, Jesus is not promoting hatred in the conventional sense, but rather using a hyperbole - an over-exaggeration - to illustrate the depth of commitment required to be His disciple. You see, in the cultural context of the time, family was not just a fundamental social unit but it was also your primary source of identity, security, and responsibility. To 'hate' your family, in the way Jesus describes, is to radically re-prioritize one's commitments, placing relationship with Jesus and the values of the kingdom of God above even the most fundamental and foundational human relationships. It's about demonstrating that allegiance to Jesus might require difficult choices, ones that are uncomfortable and ones that could lead to misunderstanding or conflict within traditional family structures. Essentially, Jesus is asking His disciples to choose Him as their ultimate loyalty, even if it means facing opposition from those they love.

A great example of this would be the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. These individuals often face significant personal and social challenges, including the ultimate rejection by their families. Yet, this demonstrates the type of radical re-prioritization that Jesus spoke of - placing one's faith and relationship with Jesus above even the closest family bonds. This example reminds us of the transformative and even costly nature of genuine discipleship, where followers may need to withstand profound personal sacrifices to adhere to their faith.

The cost of discipleship is a very real thing. And for those in places like Northern India, certain parts of the Middle East, and even China or North Korea, that cost is heightened by the risk of persecution. In these regions, choosing to follow Jesus can also result in the loss of personal safety and even life. And if you want to take it even further, history teaches us that each of the 12 disciples lost their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Now, I understand, that for those of us living in North America, the cost of discipleship simply looks different than it does in those persecuted countries. This is something that we should be grateful for, but it is also something that we cannot allow to move us into complacency. For those of us here that call ourselves Christians and claim to follow Jesus, you may be thinking, well I show up to church on Sundays, I give a few bucks here and there, and I wear a cross around my neck or tattooed on my arm.

That's good enough right?

And that comment right there is what I think is the problem with so much of our western view of Christianity. We're just looking to do the bare minimum. Many of us are just looking to get by. We simply don't want to do more than we have to.

For us, the cost of discipleship might be summed up by realizing that:

Good is the enemy of Best.

Maybe you've heard it said before that 'bad' is the enemy of 'good' which is a true and fair statement. But a truer statement would be that good is the enemy of best because 'good' often lures us into complacency, making us settle for what is merely acceptable rather than striving for what is excellent. In the context of discipleship, this concept becomes crucial. Jesus didn't die on the cross so you and I could just 'meh' our way through life. He died so that you and I could have life and life more abundantly!! But attached to that life is the lifestyle and as John Mark Comer says, 'Too many people want the life, but aren't willing to adopt the lifestyle behind it.'

Jesus is teaching that the path of discipleship often requires choosing the 'best' over merely the 'good.' According to Jesus, discipleship isn't merely about choosing what is good - many can do that - it's about discerning and doing what is best, according to the plans and purposes that God has prepared in advance for us to do. This requires a level of spiritual discernment and commitment that requires relationship and intentionality and yes, especially sacrifice and surrender.

Which now helps to bring further clarity to Jesus seemingly confusing conclusion about taking up the cross. Even though Jesus hadn't yet died on the cross, he uses this statement as a way of making a delayed point for the disciples. At the time that Jesus said this, the cross was a symbol that was associated with extreme punishment and public humiliation, reserved for the worst criminals. This imagery of suffering and total rejection would have been shocking to His listeners - but a clear call to total surrender. By using this metaphor, Jesus was not only highlighting the deep sacrifices required to follow Him but was also preparing His followers for a path that could potentially lead to similar rejection and even death.

And so, when many of these disciples would have witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross, this call would have had an even more impactful meaning for them. Seeing their teacher and leader triumph over death would transform the cross from a symbol of defeat into a powerful symbol of redemption and victory. Thus, Jesus' call to take up the cross is a call to radical discipleship - a commitment to embrace suffering and surrender personal ambitions for the promise of eternal

life, reflecting the profound paradox of Christian faith: through suffering and surrender comes true freedom and life.

At the end of the day it's a reminder that He wants all of us, not just a part. And I'll be honest with you, this can be a tough message to receive. It's very easy to hear a message like this and feel completely overwhelmed.

There are three things that I want to remind you of that will help with this:

Firstly, you might not be where you want to be, but thank God you're not where you used to be. This is the journey of sanctification.

Secondly, it's in the power of His might, not yours. This is a great act of love where God isn't calling us to harm us but to help us. And He places His Spirit within us to strengthen us because He's knows it's impossible for us without Him. He simply requires us to submit. To yield. To finally relent. And when we do, then we're ready. We're ready to put on the full armour of God because we know we're walking in step with Him and understand that this is His provision to enable us to stand. Lastly, Jesus teaches us that there is great Grace for the journey ahead. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, the Apostle Paul was on a journey himself and going through a season of feeling inept, but the Lord reminded him that, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' So, as you endeavour to follow Jesus, remember that His grace is sufficient for each step, even when you stumble. He doesn't expect us to walk this path perfectly from the start, but He does call us to persist and grow in discipline. Discipleship is about transformation, achieved not in our strength but through His grace and power. Embrace this journey as a process of becoming more like Christ, knowing that each step forward is supported by His unfailing love and grace.

Ephesians 3:20-21

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

Blessing

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