



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

26 APRIL - 1 MAY 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week we conclude our readings from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The Thoughts are based mainly on the text in bold type.

MONDAY - Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.'⁹ (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Thought for the day

In the earliest years of the church, in spite of differences of culture and doctrine, it was always a fervent hope that Christians would represent unity to the world around them. Two thousand years later we still pray for unity, though often without much expectation that it will be achieved. In this passage Paul first describes the attitudes that will serve to encourage unity (v1-3) before hammering home the singularities (one body, one Spirit, one hope etc) that ought to ensure it (v4-6). He then goes on to commend the diversity of gifts that contribute to strengthening the unity of the body of Christ (v7,11-13). In any church there will be differences of opinion; what do we learn here about agreement or how to disagree well?

TUESDAY - Ephesians 4:17-32

¹⁷ Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of impurity. ²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ. ²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. ²² You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and

work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ **Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,** ³² **and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.**

Thought for the day

There was a strong sense in Paul's day that Christians were called to behave differently from others (v17-24). This is not simply a question of superior ethics or morals, but is inherent in lives which have been transformed by recognising Jesus as Lord (v20-21) and set apart by the power of the Holy Spirit (v30). God's love and forgiveness to us should overflow into our own relationships, within and outside the church (v31-32). Our culture may not be so overtly hostile to Christianity as was the pagan world of the first century, but we cannot be complacent about subtle and not so subtle cultural norms that tug us away from the truth in Jesus. Let's pray today for maturity, discernment and courage.

WEDNESDAY - Ephesians 5:1-14

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be associated with them. ⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

Thought for the day

Today's reading continues the contrast between good and bad ways of living and starts with the picture of children who know they are well-loved wanting to imitate their Father (v1), in particular by living in the kind of love that Jesus showed when he became a 'fragrant offering to God' (v2). Paul uses the familiar metaphor of living in the light (v8,11-13) and links it with the resurrection of Jesus in what may be an excerpt from an early Christian hymn (v14). Perhaps the metaphor is over-familiar, but it may help us identify aspects of our own lives which we are not keen should come under anyone's spotlight, even our own (v11).

THURSDAY - Ephesians 5:15-33

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; **but be filled with the Spirit,** ¹⁹ **as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,** ²⁰ **giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he

nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' ³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Thought for the day

The highlighted text (v18b-20) has an exuberance which is hard to resist - and why should we? To be filled with the Holy Spirit, and in consequence to 'sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord' and to give thanks to God all the time sounds like a fulfilled and happy life. It is good to hold this as today's governing thought as Paul goes on to develop what it means 'to be subject to one another' (v21). There is then an unfortunate distinction between the implications for wives and husbands - women are indeed to be subject (in everything) to their husbands (v22-24); husbands are to love their wives as themselves (v25-33). This may in practice amount to much the same thing but it is hard to disentangle the practical effect from the underpinning explanations which surely enunciate the superiority of men over women, with all the potential for abuse that that entails. In Paul's time that might have been unexceptionable, but not now. How might we want to rewrite this last section in such a way that it would better honour the general principle in verse 21?

FRIDAY - Ephesians 6:1-9

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² 'Honour your father and mother'—this is the first commandment with a promise: ³ 'so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'

⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; ⁶ not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, ⁸ knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

⁹ And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Thought for the day

After his somewhat unsatisfactory discussion of relationships between wife and husband, Paul turns to two other important sets of relationships - child/parent and slave/master. In each case he states, as his starting point, the traditional response to the power imbalance within such relationships: children to obey their parents (v1-2); slaves to serve their masters wholeheartedly (v5-8). But he goes further than this and instructs parents to respect their children (v4) and masters their slaves (v9). It's a start in restoring dignity but we may feel it doesn't go far enough in making the love and compassion of Jesus the touchstone of all relationships.

SATURDAY - Ephesians 6:10-24

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts.

²³ Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thought for the day

And so we reach the end of the letter and what will be for many people one of the best known encouragements to living the Christian life - putting on the whole armour of God (v10,13). Even here we may not feel entirely comfortable with the military imagery. But in Paul's view, we are involved in a war against evil, not simply as we confront it in our own lives but as it seeks to overpower the essential goodness of the created order (v12). Above everything we are to 'stand firm' (v13) protected by all we know to be true and Godly (v14 - righteousness is God's attribute), holding firm to the gospel of peace (v15), secure in the faith by which we are saved and which is guaranteed by God's word (v16-17). As we relish the pictures Paul offers us here, we might find it helpful to think about the chinks in our own armour - where might we be most vulnerable to the 'flaming arrows of the evil one' (v16)? We all have such chinks; we all need to seek God's help in our prayers, not just for ourselves but for our whole Christian community (the saints - v18).

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