

CHAPTER 36: Paul's Letters Part 1

Romans thru Ephesians

In the next two chapters we will cover the 13 Pauline Epistles, Paul's letters. This one focuses on the first five – Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians. There is just SO MUCH deep theology here – incredibly rich and life-changing truths. Summarizing Paul's 13 letters is a bit like condensing a seven-course meal down to just a few bites. First of all, it is very difficult to do and second, it doesn't do Paul's letters justice. They really need to be read and studied in depth. But that is for another time. For now, our purpose will be to run a broad brushstroke across these five letters and see how they fit into the overall biblical story.

We often think of the First Century churches as having their act together spiritually. But that was NOT the case. Those churches were made up of fallible human beings like you and me who, though saved by grace, still possessed a fallen sinful nature. They struggled with sin. They were real people with real problems. On top of that, persecution hit the churches hard very early on. Many followers of Jesus were martyred for their faith. There were constant clashes with the culture of the day. It was not uncommon for new believers to be ostracized by their families and communities. Life was NOT easy.

Not only did the Early Church have all that to deal with, but then there were all those false teachers. They were like wolves who slipped into the flock and led many new and vulnerable believers astray. Temptations, quarrels and various struggles made their way into the churches. These problems tested the church's resolve to carry out its mission – the Great Commission – to go preach the Gospel and make disciples. Godly direction was desperately needed in these troubled times. This direction came by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the teachings of the apostles. Their words have been preserved for us in what we call The Epistles, hand-written letters which make up a third of the entire New Testament.

ROMANS

Paul penned his letter to the Romans from Corinth during his third missionary journey. As Paul writes this, he has yet to visit Rome. He wants to go and minister to the church there which is made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Though Paul had never been to Rome and had no part in starting the church there, he knows many of the Christians there personally. He names more than 20 individuals at the end of this letter. The Epistle of Romans is heavy on Christian theology. But it's more than just Paul informing the believers in Rome about where he stands on various issues.

Since Paul had not visited Rome yet, there were some who thought – not knowing Paul – that maybe he was ashamed of the Gospel. But Paul counters this notion right off the bat. He says... **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, "The righteous by faith will live."** (Romans 1:16-17)

Paul's theology stresses imputed righteousness. This is righteousness that God credits to a person's account because of their faith in Jesus and what He did for them on the cross... **namely the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.** (Romans 3:22) **But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, because we have now been declared righteous by His blood [death on the cross], we will be saved through Him from God's wrath.** (Romans 5:8-9) This means that judgment under the Law has been removed from those who are counted as righteous by faith. This is great news, especially for the Gentile believers. It opens the door for them to become joint heirs of the promises God made to His people Israel back in the Old Testament. This is HUGE!

Not surprisingly many of the Jewish believers object to Paul's gospel. They insist that the Law given to Moses must still be kept. In their minds disobedience to the Law qualifies one for God's wrath. That's what their Scriptures declare. Gentiles are in danger of falling under God's wrath since they do not keep the Law. But Paul points out that the Jewish believers are no better off than Gentile believers. Jews and Gentiles are in the same boat. And why is that? Because EVERYONE has sinned! **What then? Are we [Jews] better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin, just as it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one..."** (Romans 3:9-10) It really doesn't matter what religious label you put on yourself. The fact is that all of us are sinners... **For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** (Romans 3:22-23)

This is a BIG problem if you want to have a relationship with a holy God. Sin separates us from God. But there's good news: **Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Romans 5:1) Jesus bridges the gap! Because of what Jesus did we are no longer separated from God. Jesus has made it possible for us to have a personal relationship, a friendship with God! For all of us who believe in Jesus and have placed our faith and trust in Him to save us, God has released us from the penalty of our sin! **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** (Romans 8:1) It is NOT that we have received a "not guilty" verdict. The fact is that we ARE guilty. But God the Judge in His mercy has acquitted us because someone else, Jesus Christ, His Son, has already paid the penalty for our sin! Instead of condemnation, we receive a pardon. This is fantastic news!

As believers we have this assurance: **And we [Christians] know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, because those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...** (Romans 8:28-29) God is at work in your life. He is working all things, past, present and, yes, even future for our good! The truth is that God has already worked everything out from the beginning of creation to the end of time.

God's ultimate desire for us is that we become more and more like Jesus. We are not called to be like other Christians. We are called to be like Christ. God has predestined, called, and justified us. This has already happened in your life.

The letter to the Romans is packed with so many wonderful truths. A key point that Paul constantly hammers home is this: Whether Jew or Gentile, all of us are saved the same way – by faith in Jesus. **Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness; and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation... For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** (Romans 10:9-10,13)

In view of all that God has done for us, in His great mercy saving us, how should we then live? **Therefore, I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God – which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...** (Romans 12:1-2) As saved people, we have a whole new perspective on life. We should not act like the lost world around us. We should be different in our character, in our attitudes and in our behavior. The outward change that people notice begins in our minds. The Holy Spirit works in us renewing our minds. He reorients us to God's way of thinking – what we call TOP LINE. Only then are we able to know what God's will is, what He wants.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Paul started the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey. Corinth is a city noted for its excess and sexual promiscuity. Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth explaining to his mostly Gentile audience (there were some Jews also) that Jesus Christ had come, died for their sins, been resurrected and ushered in the age of grace. This means that they had forgiveness of all sin and were free from the Law. After equipping the saints with a full knowledge of Jesus, Paul left Corinth. As soon as he did, false teachers then crept into the church. They filled the minds of the new believers with wrong ideas. The Corinthian Christians began to misunderstand the grace that Paul had talked about. You see, Paul had taught them that they were free from the Law and that everything had already been accomplished for their salvation. They concluded that they were free from authority. They figured that they didn't have to obey and keep any rules. They developed a flawed theology about their freedom in Christ. The result was that a multitude of sins found their way into the church. This prompted Paul to write what we know as FIRST CORINTHIANS.

There are three general areas that Paul addresses in this letter. First, there are divisions in this church. These divisions are centered on the loyalties that people had developed toward their favorite church leaders, Paul being one of them. **I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose.** (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Second, they are spiritually immature. **So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready.** (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

Third, they are being worldly or carnal or fleshly. **For you are still influenced by the flesh. For since there is still jealousy and dissension among you, are you not influenced by the flesh and behaving like unregenerate people?** (1 Corinthians 3:3) Paul basically says that the Corinthian believers are acting like unsaved people! This is a big problem because as Christians our bodies are God's dwelling place. **Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?** (1 Corinthians 3:16) What we do with our physical bodies matters. Paul urges them... **Flee sexual immorality!** (1 Corinthians 6:18) Run away from it and don't look back!

Paul addresses a specific issue that has to do with sin in the church. A certain man in their congregation (not named but the readers know who he is) – this man has been living in sin with his father's wife. The affair is widely known by all. Instead of confronting the man, the church body in essence has been condoning his action by not saying

anything about it. Paul says this to them: **And you are proud! Shouldn't you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you? When you gather together in the name of our Lord Jesus... turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.** (1 Corinthians 5:2, 4-5) The church needs to hold this man accountable for his sinful actions! The idea is to get his attention so that he can be saved and turn his life around.

First Corinthians discusses many difficult topics that the church in Corinth must deal with if they are going to have an effective ministry. It talks about the proper use of spiritual gifts, Christian marriages, sexual purity, singleness, living as Christians in a pagan culture, gives instructions for worship and the Lord's Supper, diversity of people within the church body, and so forth. Paul addresses many issues. Throughout this letter Paul is clear – a believer's behavior DOES matter to God!

This brings us now to the most familiar part of First Corinthians – First Corinthians 13, commonly referred to as “the Love Chapter.” You frequently hear parts of this chapter read at weddings. Ironically in Corinth during this time there is a large temple where people worship Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. The Corinthians may think they know what love is, but based on the way they've been acting, they do NOT. So, Paul explains what real love is and is not – from God's perspective.

Love is patient, love is kind, it is not envious. Love does not brag, it is not [arrogant]. It is not rude, it is not self-serving, it is not easily angered or resentful. It is not glad about injustice, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends... (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) Other translations say that “love never fails.” The chapter concludes with that famous line: **And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.** (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Toward the end of the letter Paul discusses Jesus's resurrection. It is so important to Paul's theology. Apparently, the Corinthians have some questions about it. **For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received – that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures...** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) “According to the scriptures” is not a reference to the Gospels. They haven't been written yet. Paul is talking about how Jesus's death and resurrection fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures.

He appeared to [Peter], then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have [died]. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of

all... He appeared to me [Paul] also. (1 Corinthians 15:5-8) These multiple appearances by Jesus offer strong evidence for His resurrection.

How important is Jesus' resurrection to our faith? Does it really matter all that much? Paul answers this for us by saying, **If Christ has not been raised (if He was not resurrected from the dead), your faith is useless; you are still in your sins.** (1 Corinthians 15:17) It sounds like Paul thinks that Jesus's resurrection is pretty important!

Later on, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul reveals in great detail the future resurrection of the dead. We will look at that later in the story.

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Based on the contents of First Corinthians we know that the spiritual well-being of the church at Corinth was not good. Like a parent dealing with a rebellious teenager, Paul's relationship with this church is strained. Paul later meets up with Titus in Macedonia. To his relief and joy Titus brings him good news – the majority of those in the church at Corinth have repented! Cautiously optimistic but still deeply concerned about this church, Paul pens another letter to them – SECOND CORINTHIANS.

Although the tone of this letter is much more upbeat and positive than the first one, there are still unresolved issues to address. Paul is in the process of taking up a collection for the saints at Jerusalem. But some of Paul's detractors in the church – those false teachers, those wolves we talked about earlier – are talking trash about Paul. Among other things, they claim that they are more knowledgeable than Paul. They criticize Paul for what they perceive as financial greediness. They label him as indecisive. Apparently, Paul had not come to Corinth in the timeframe he had indicated and so they weren't happy about that. Paul addresses all of these issues.

Paul defends his change of plans. The reason he did not come to Corinth as originally planned was because he felt a visit so soon after his hard-hitting first letter would be too painful for both the church and for him personally. He says this: **So, I made up my own mind not to pay you another painful visit. For out of great distress and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears, not to make you sad, but to let you know the love that I have especially for you.** (2 Corinthians 2:1,4) He's talking about the pain and sadness he felt when he wrote his first letter.

Do you remember that man who was living immorally, the one Paul mentioned in his first letter? Well apparently, this church DID take decisive action and put the man out

of the church. Now he has repented. Paul tells the Corinthian believers what they are to do now. **This punishment on such an individual by the majority is enough for him, so that now instead you should rather forgive and comfort him. This will keep him from being overwhelmed by excessive grief to the point of despair. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.** (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). He's been punished enough. It is time to forgive and restore him back to full fellowship.

Paul spends much of this letter defending his apostleship and ministry. He sees the Corinthian believers as the best evidence that God is working through him. He expresses this beautifully: **You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone, revealing that you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts.** (2 Corinthians 3:2-3) Paul says, in effect, "You are living letters. Your lives tell a story to everyone around you."

As far as the criticism Paul's detractors have levied at him about his teaching ability and knowledge, Paul downplays this. He focuses on the real source of any ministry success he has had. **For we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For God, who said "Let light shine out of darkness," is the One who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ.** (2 Corinthians 4:5-6)

The best-known verse in Second Corinthians talks about how God completely changes a person whenever they are saved. God is the Creator and we are His new creation. **So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – look, what is new has come!** (2 Corinthians 5:17) It's all about what God does. It's not about us!

In this letter Paul gives a lot of practical advice about Christian living. He also reflects on his own life and ministry. Paul reveals a personal struggle that he's been dealing with. It's something he calls a "thorn in the flesh." **Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me... I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. But He said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."** So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. **Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.** (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Paul never mentions what this thorn in the flesh is, but whatever or whoever it is keeps Paul humble and completely dependent upon God.

Paul closes by mentioning his plans to visit Corinth soon and history tells us that he eventually did.

GALATIANS

The epistle to the Galatians was written to several churches in the prosperous region of Galatia. It was a chain letter that was passed around to the various churches Paul started during his first missionary journey. A problem arose when some Jewish false teachers infiltrated the churches in Galatia – those wolves again. They opposed Paul’s teaching that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus alone and not by works. They accused Paul of being a man pleaser who preaches circumcision while in Jerusalem with the Jews there; then Paul did not require circumcision in the Gentile lands so that he might be popular with them. They said that Paul’s teaching that you don’t have to keep the Law of Moses to be saved in effect puts the Galatian Gentile believers under a curse according to the Old Testament. Paul wrote this letter to the Galatian believers in response to these erroneous claims.

Paul goes right on the offensive. **I am astonished that you [Galatian believers] are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel – not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell!** (Galatians 1:6-8) So Paul doesn’t mince any words.

Paul defends his own apostleship and authority. He mentions how the apostles in the church at Jerusalem embraced and welcomed him as an equal. He says that **[the apostles] recognized the grace that had been given to me.** (Galatians 2:9) Paul talks about his experience at the Jerusalem Council which he attended recently. There the apostles affirmed his theological position that new converts do not need to be circumcised. The Jerusalem Council had sided with Paul on this important issue.

Paul brings up an incident in Antioch where he confronted the Apostle Peter. **I opposed [Peter] to his face, because he had clearly done wrong.** (Galatians 2:11) Paul describes how Peter had distanced himself from the Gentile believers in Antioch out of fear of what his longtime Jewish friends might think of him. Unfortunately, many in the church at Antioch joined Peter in his hypocrisy. **But when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to [Peter] in front of them all, “If you, although you are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you try to force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”** (Galatians 2:14)

Paul drives home his main point throughout this letter that salvation is by faith in Jesus and in what He did and not by our keeping the Law...**we know that no one is**

justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Jesus Christ... (Galatians 2:16)

The best-known verse in Galatians is Paul's personal testimony: **I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So, the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.** (Galatians 2:20) This illustrates the idea that Paul talks about in his letters of dying to self and living for Christ.

Paul finds it hard to fathom that the Galatian believers would willfully choose to embrace the false doctrine of Jewish legalism over the truth that he taught them. **You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?** (Galatians 3:1, 3) Paul cannot understand why they would embrace legalism after experiencing freedom in Christ? That's like a person voluntarily going in and locking himself up in a prison cell. It makes absolutely no sense!

Paul reminds the Galatians that even the patriarch Abraham didn't keep the Law. He couldn't because it hadn't been given yet. **Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.** (Galatians 3:6) Paul then quotes from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk. **Now it is clear no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous one will live by faith.** (Galatians 3:11 quoting Habakkuk 2:4) So this concept of salvation by faith is not some nice new idea that Paul came up with. His point is that salvation has always been faith, by believing God.

OK then, if keeping the Law doesn't save you then why was it given? Paul explains the purpose of the Law. It guided God's people to the place spiritually they needed to be, that was, recognizing themselves as sinners. The Law also operated as a temporary restraint putting up guardrails in people's lives. **Thus, the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.** (Galatians 3:24-25) A guardian in Roman times was a person who had been given the authority to teach and guide a child. Other translations say schoolmaster or tutor. Now that these believers have come to faith in Christ and have the Holy Spirit living in them, they no longer need the Law. **If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.** (Galatians 5:18)

Paul discusses the spiritual battle that takes place within us as fallen human beings – even in believers. **But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.** (Galatians 5:16-17) Paul lists

specific “desires of the flesh.” These are bottom line behaviors that do not please God. They include things like idolatry, drunkenness, jealousy and immorality.

He then lists the “fruit of the spirit.” **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...**

(Galatians 5:22-23) These are top line character traits that are produced by the Holy Spirit. The contrast in a person’s behavior is rather obvious.

EPHESIANS

While Paul was in Rome for two years confined under house arrest and awaiting his hearing before Caesar, he penned the first of his four “Prison Epistles,” the epistle to the EPHESIANS. Paul started the church in Ephesus during his second missionary journey. He returned about a year later while on his third missionary journey and spent three years ministering there. This letter offers much needed words of encouragement for believers living under an oppressive, pagan government. Paul details the nature of the church and God’s plan for it. The church at Ephesus was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s message is great news for the Gentiles who enjoy all rights and privileges as saints. Paul urges this diverse body of believers toward unity, to function as the living body of Jesus here on earth. Let’s take a look at some of the highlights from this letter.

Paul begins by extolling the wonderful gift of salvation that we have received. As believers we already have all the spiritual blessings in Christ – things like inner peace, joy, wisdom, hope and gratitude. **Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ.** (Ephesians 1:3) “Has blessed,” past tense; these blessings are not things way off in the future somewhere. We have them right now.

For He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in His sight in love. (Ephesians 1:4) This is an amazing thought. Think about it – the God of the universe chose us! He adopted us **as His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of His will.** (Ephesians 1:5) As you can see, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is quite deep theologically.

Paul describes the salvation process so eloquently: **Although you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ...lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ...made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved! – and He raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly**

realms in Christ Jesus... (Ephesians 2:1-6) What a glorious thought that is! Picture this – you are at a funeral when suddenly, right in the middle of it, you see the top of the casket open up and a hand coming out. What would you think? After getting over your shock you would think, “What a miracle this is!” Well, our salvation is no less a miracle. We were dead. Now we have been made alive!

A much-quoted passage in Ephesians underscore a key theology of Paul’s, that is, our salvation is BY GRACE and not by works. **For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9) No good deeds that we perform will earn us salvation. Why does God choose to save us? What is His purpose? Paul tells us in the very next verse...**For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.** (Ephesians 2:10) Good works do not save us. They are a result of our salvation.

OK, so now that we have been saved by grace, Paul says: **I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called...** (Ephesians 4:1) Live a life worthy of your calling. How are we to live? **With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:2-3) This sounds a lot like the fruit of the Spirit Paul talked about in Galatians. We the Church, are one body. We have one Lord, one Spirit, one calling, one faith, one baptism, and one mission. There is a lot that unifies us.

Paul says that God has equipped the church body with various spiritual gifts and abilities... **to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ.** (Ephesians 4:12)

Paul goes on to exhort the Ephesian believers to continue to grow spiritually. **But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.** (Ephesians 4:15) Basically the idea is that we become more like Christ.

Believers are to live holy lives... **to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man who has been created in God’s image – in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.** (Ephesians 4:23-24)

As Christians, we are to submit ourselves mutually to each other out of our love and reverence for Jesus Christ – **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ** (Ephesians 5:21) Consider the relationship between Jesus and His Church. In a real sense it is a marriage – Jesus is the groom and we, the Church, are His bride. As stated before, Jesus is “the head” and we, the Church, gladly submit to Him.

In a healthy marriage relationship, the husband assumes the role of Christ. He loves his wife and takes great care of her. By doing so, this frees his wife to submit to her husband. She can do this without any reservation because she completely respects and trusts her husband, knowing how much he loves her.

The same concept applies to family relationships. **Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely, “that it may go well with you and that you will live a long time on the earth.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** (Ephesians 6:1-4) In a healthy parent-child relationship the child submits to his or her parental authority just as we the Church submit to Christ. In return parents exemplify the loving character of Jesus back to their children.

Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with a reminder that we are in a spiritual battle. We need to be prepared for our enemy and put on the full armor of God. **Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.** (Ephesians 6:11-13)

So, there is a summary of Ephesians. There’s a lot more we could say about it, but that gives you some idea of its amazing contents. I’ll reiterate what I said at the beginning of this chapter – these letters are intended to be read and studied in depth. Paul’s letters are gold mines of truth. In the next chapter we will look at the rest of Paul’s letters which are a bit shorter in length than the ones we just looked at. But whether long or short, each one of Paul’s letters is filled with gold!