

CATHOLIC COMMENTARY ON SACRED SCRIPTURE



Ephesians

Peter S. Williamson

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Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy
GENERAL EDITORS

Questions for Personal Reflection or Small Group Study

In addition to the questions below, the Reflection and Application sections throughout the commentary contain questions for reflection and implicitly suggest various ways of acting on the message of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:1–14

1. Did you realize that each of us, like Mary, was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be “holy and without blemish” before God? What does knowing this fact mean to you? (v. 4; pp. 32–34, 36–37)
2. Have you come to understand yourself as a son or daughter of God the Father because of your relationship with Christ? If so, what difference does this make? (vv. 5–6; pp. 32, 35–36)
3. How does what Christ has done “sum up” all that God did for his people in the past? (vv. 9–10; pp. 37–39)
4. How will life be different when everything is fully under Christ as head? (vv. 9–10; pp. 37–39)
5. What are some ways you see the Spirit working in your life? How does the presence of the Spirit “mark” you as belonging to God and provide a “down payment” on the fullness of our inheritance in the kingdom of God? (vv. 13–14; pp. 40–44)
6. How does the prayer of praise that begins the book of Ephesians help you to appreciate the extraordinary gifts we have received in Christ? For which blessings do you feel most grateful? What response do you wish to make to God? (vv. 3–14; pp. 43–44)

Ephesians 1:15–23

1. In what ways are Christians today like the children of the czar, playing in the royal treasury without thinking of the value of the jewels in our possession? (p. 45)
2. What strikes you about St. Paul's prayer life from the brief glimpse these verses provide? Do faith and love, demonstrated in his constant thanksgiving and prayer for others, characterize your life? What concrete step can you take to be more consistent in prayer and thanksgiving? (vv. 15–17; pp. 46–48)
3. What is the future “hope” to which God has called us, the “riches of glory in his inheritance”? What difference can it make in your life today? (v. 18; pp. 49–50)
4. Describe the kind of knowledge that Paul asks God for his readers. Do you experience this kind of knowledge? How can inner knowledge of God or of divine revelation make a difference in how we live? (v. 18; pp. 49–50)
5. Imagine Jesus' crucified body lying in the tomb, then raised from death and transformed into a new kind of body (Luke 24; 1 Cor 15:35–58), and then raised above the earth and beyond all angelic and demonic powers to sit at God's right hand to share God's divine throne (Rev 5:6; 21:1). Remember that all this was “for the Church, which is his body.” What difference can this truth make for us if we keep it in mind? (v. 20; p. 52)
6. Did you realize that Jesus retains his human nature and resurrected human body on the throne of God at this moment and will do so for all eternity? What does this imply about the dignity that God has bestowed on the human race in comparison to every other kind of creature? (vv. 20–21; pp. 52–53)

7. How do you see the powers of the world arrayed against God's people? How can we keep Christ's present and future supreme power in mind to strengthen us in the midst of our trials? (vv. 21–22; pp. 51–54)

8. What does it mean for the Church to be Christ's body and for him to be the head of the body? (vv. 22–23; pp. 50–55)

Ephesians 2:1–10

1. What makes you most aware of humanity's need for salvation? Give concrete examples. (vv. 1–3; pp. 56–60)
2. What does Paul tell us are God's motives for saving us? Do you believe that is God's attitude toward you? (vv. 4–7; pp. 60–63)
3. What does Ephesians 2:4–10 say to human pride and to religious self-reliance? Are you ever tempted to think that God owes you something because of how you have conducted yourself? (pp. 63–68)
4. Alternatively, are you ever tempted to despair because of what you've done? What hope do these verses offer to people who feel the weight of their sins? (vv. 4–9)
5. Do you think of yourself as God's "work of art," created in Christ Jesus? What do you think are the good works God has prepared in advance for you to do? (v. 10; p. 64)
6. Although it is necessary that we persevere in grace, what indications are there in Ephesians of God's attitude toward us and of his willingness to do everything necessary on his side to save us? (vv. 4–7; pp. 60–63, 67–68)

Ephesians 2:11–22

1. Imagine yourself separated from Christ, excluded from the people of God, without God's promises, having no hope of eternal life, and no relationship with God. Now recall that Jesus came and died on the cross so that you could experience these blessings. When did you first realize what God did for you through Christ's death and resurrection? (vv. 11–16; pp. 69–76)
2. In light of the grace that we have experienced, how should we conduct ourselves toward those who do not yet understand what Christ has done for them?
3. What are the practical implications of the fact that Christ has established peace between you and God and has given you access to the Father through the Spirit? (vv. 17–18; pp. 76–79)
4. Review the history of God's dwelling among his people in the Old and New Testaments (see pp. 82–83). What difference does it make to understand that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit? How does it change the way you view your brothers and sisters and the life of the Church? (vv. 19–22; pp. 79–84)
5. How can we understand the Church as both a sacred temple and as a human institution that contains sinners? (vv. 21–22; pp. 81–82)
6. What are the implications for your prayer life of being "members of the household of God," "a temple," and "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit"? (vv. 19–22)
7. What does it mean that Christ unites the Church, holding it all together? (vv. 20–22)

Ephesians 3:1–13

1. What is the mystery of Christ and why does Paul consider it so extraordinary? (vv. 4–6; pp. 87–89)
2. The first Gentile readers of Ephesians needed reassurance that they belonged to the “commonwealth of Israel.” Today we Gentile Christians need to remember that our faith is built upon God’s special relationship with and promises to the Jewish people. What implications does this have for how Christians should relate to Jews? What does Ephesians say about the profound unity Gentile Christians have with Jews who recognize Jesus as their Messiah? (2:11–19; 3:4–6; pp. 89–92)
3. Christianity has been known and embraced by Gentiles for many centuries in Europe and the Americas. Where today is the gospel encountering people who have never heard it?
4. Jesus referred to those he freed from demonic power as “goods” taken from the “strong man” (Satan) after having bound him (see Matt 12:28–29). Have you ever thought of the power of the gospel and of salvation in this way? (vv. 7–10; pp. 92–94)
5. Many texts in the New Testament teach that human society outside of Christ is in some way under Satan’s power (2:2; 6:12; John 14:30; 1 John 5:19). How does this New Testament worldview correspond with your experience?
6. Paul was thrilled at the privilege of knowing God’s eternal plan and eager to fulfill his role in it, regardless of what it cost him (see Acts 20:22–24; Phil 3:7–10). How can we be more like him? How can you imitate his awe at “the mystery of Christ” and his zeal to proclaim the gospel? (vv. 1, 4–8, 13)

Ephesians 3:14–21

1. Paul describes himself as kneeling before the Father. When you kneel in prayer, what does it mean to you? What does it suggest about the character of God to recognize him as “Father” and the source of all fatherhood? (v. 14; pp. 96–97)
2. What does it mean to welcome Christ coming to live in you more fully by *faith*? (v. 17; pp. 98–99)
3. What does it mean to know God? (see p. 100) Are you rooted and grounded in God’s love? (vv. 17–18; pp. 98–99)
4. What does it mean to be “filled with all the fullness of God”? Did you realize that “divinization” is God’s plan for us? Do you pray, as Paul does, for yourself and others, for the Spirit to strengthen your inner self so that you can understand God’s plan, know Christ’s love, and be filled with God’s fullness? (vv. 16–19; pp. 97–101)
5. Do you believe that God “is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us” and that he is willing to do so? How can this Scriptural promise strengthen our confidence when we pray? What can we expect God to do for us? (v. 20; pp. 102–4)

Ephesians 4:1–16

1. Considering the particular Christian communities to which you belong—your family, prayer community, or parish—which of the virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love do you most need in order to strengthen the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Are there any blockages in relationships (see p. 112) that you can remove? (vv. 2–3; pp. 107–10)
2. Review the “seven unities” that Paul says unite baptized believers in Christ. How does the profound unity that already exists motivate you to reach out to fellow Christians, including those with whom you disagree or perhaps who belong to other Christian communities? (v. 4; pp. 110–11)
3. Paul says that the risen Jesus has given each one of us grace “to build up the body of Christ” in one way or another. How have you experienced his grace, the Holy Spirit, working through you to strengthen the members of Christ’s body? How do you see Jesus at work through other members of your community? (vv. 7, 11–12, 16; pp. 114, 116–18, 124)
4. If you fulfill a role of leadership in your community, do you understand that your primary role is to equip others for the work of ministry? What are some ways you can do so more effectively? Are there newer Christians or younger people in your community you could “mentor” in some way or another? (vv. 11–12, 16; pp. 116–19)
5. What needs to change in your life for you “to live the truth in love” and to grow “in every way into him who is the head, Christ”? (v. 15; pp. 121–23)
6. Reflect on the maturity of the Christian community (or communities) to which you belong. To what degree are there (1) relationships characterized by love, humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance; (2) unity and stability in apostolic doctrine and in relationship with Jesus; and (3) fruitful ministry according to diverse gifts under the guidance of overall leaders? How can you contribute to the maturity in Christ of the community to which you belong? (vv. 1–16; pp. 120–24)

Ephesians 4:17–5:2

1. How did you “learn” Christ? When and where did you first “hear about him” and where were you “taught in him”? At what point did your relationship with Christ help you to see the need to change your way of life? (4:17–24; pp. 125–31)
2. What does it mean for you that “the truth is in Jesus”? (4:20–21; pp. 127–28)
3. Do you experience the difference between the “old self” and the “new self”? Explain. What does it mean to “put away” the old self and its conduct and to “put on” the new self that is united to Christ? (4:22–24; pp. 127–31)
4. Concretely, what do you think it means to be renewed in the spirit of your mind? What can you do to deepen your understanding of the gospel and to renew your way of thinking? (4:23–24; pp. 128–30)
5. Does reflecting on 4:20–24 give rise to any ideas about how your parish community can introduce people to a relationship with Jesus and catechize them more effectively? (pp. 130–31)
6. In many respects the ethical instruction of 4:25–29 is simply common sense. But the word of God has a depth and power that exceeds our expectations. Is there anything in particular that strikes you about the way Paul exhorts his readers to tell the truth, to not hold onto anger, to not steal, and to avoid foul language? (pp. 131–33)
7. What might change in your life if you thought more about not grieving the Holy Spirit who lives within you? Or about imitating God the Father’s forgiveness, kindness, and compassion toward you? Or about following the example of Jesus’ love and self-offering on the cross? (4:30–5:2; pp. 134, 136–37)

Ephesians 5:3–20

1. Paul's words in vv. 3–6 show us that sexuality is important in God's eyes, since he regards its misuse so seriously. What can we do as individuals, families, and parish communities to change our own attitudes, to grow in holiness in this area, and to communicate to others the true value of human sexuality? (pp. 138–42)
2. What are some of the concrete ways in which you and other Catholics you know are most susceptible to becoming partners in darkness with worldly people, rather than living as the children of light that we are in Christ? How can we discern what is pleasing to the Lord? (vv. 7–11; pp. 142–45)
3. What "fruitless works of darkness" might the Lord be asking you to "expose," either by the testimony of words or deeds? (vv. 11–14; pp. 144–48)
4. In your own experience, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? If you have experienced being filled with the Spirit, how was it manifest in your words or deeds? (vv. 18–20; pp. 149–53)
5. Do you regularly seek to be filled with the Spirit? How can you make seeking the grace and guidance of the Spirit a regular part of your life? (vv. 18–20; pp. 149–53)

Ephesians 5:21–33

1. Paul addresses all Christians when he says, “Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ” on the basis of our unity and equality in Christ. Concretely, what ought this mean in our parish relationships? In our family relationships? (v. 21; pp. 155–57)
2. Jesus himself has washed us “by the bath of water with the word.” How do baptism and the word of God provide the foundation of our quest for holiness? Jesus gave himself up for us in order to present us to himself at the last day “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” How can this goal motivate us? (vv. 26–27; pp. 166–68)
3. How is the relationship of Christ and the Church like that of a husband and wife? In what respects is it infinitely different? (vv. 23–32; pp. 160, 171–73)
4. What do you think Paul meant when he said in the first century that a wife ought to defer to her husband as to the Lord? What did he *not* mean? (vv. 22–24; pp. 158–64)
5. Practically speaking, what does it mean for a husband to love his wife and give himself for her as Christ did for the Church? What does it mean for him to love her in the same way he cares for his own body? (vv. 25, 28–29; pp. 164–66, 168–69)
6. Paul teaches that husband and wife, united as head and body, form an organic union. What implications follow from this analogy for the unity of marriage? (vv. 31–32; pp. 171–73)
7. According to the Catechism 1624, in matrimony “the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church . . . the seal of their covenant, the ever-available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity.” Practically speaking, how can husbands and wives draw on the grace of the Spirit given in the sacrament of marriage?

8. Granting that wives and husbands desire both love *and* respect from their partners, do you see any reason why Paul emphasizes *love* to husbands and *respect* to wives? (v. 33; pp. 169–70, 175)

9. How do you think Paul's teaching about wives deferring to their husbands applies in contemporary societies that recognize the equality between women and men? (vv. 22–24; pp. 176–78) If you are married, what does your spouse think about this?

Ephesians 6:1–9

1. How do Paul's instructions to children and parents apply at this point in your life? (vv. 1–4; pp. 180–82)
2. In contemporary society, it is difficult for parents to pass on their faith to their children. What can we who are parents do to raise our children “with the training and instruction of the Lord”? What can the rest of us do to support Catholic parents as they fulfill this important role? (v. 4; pp. 182–84)
3. Paul understood the law of Moses, and the Old Testament in general, to have great value for Christian life, and so does the Church (see Catechism 121–23). How much do you read and study the Old Testament? (vv. 2–3; pp. 180–83)¹
4. If you are an employee, how can Paul's instructions to slaves guide your conduct? If you are an employer, or supervise others, how can Paul's instructions to masters guide you? (vv. 5–9; pp. 184–88)
5. To understand slavery in the ancient world and the way it is treated in Scripture, read the sidebars on pp. 185, 186, and 188. What forms of slavery still exist in the world today, and what can we do to combat these practices and to help rescue those who are enslaved?

1. Over the course of three years, the Church's Sunday Mass readings include 40.8 percent of the New Testament, but only 3.7 percent of the Old Testament. If *all* the weekday readings at Mass are added, the percentages rise to 71.4 percent of the New Testament, but only 13.5 percent of the Old Testament! One of the best ways of becoming more familiar with the Old Testament is to adopt a daily reading plan that will take you through the whole Bible. Such a plan can include generous portions of the Old Testament, either by alternating reading Old and New Testament books or by reading some of both each day.

Ephesians 6:10–24

1. How conscious are you of the fact that the fundamental struggle in the Christian life is not against human opponents or even our own weakness but against the invisible and often subtle opposition of the devil and evil spirits? What are the ways in which you perceive the devil at work to oppose God and to intimidate or deceive God's people? (v. 12; pp. 190–93)
2. Practically speaking, how can we “draw [our] strength from the Lord and from his mighty power” so that we can continue to “stand firm”? (v. 10; pp. 190–91)
3. Review each of the attitudes and actions that Paul identifies as the armor of God. Which of these is most important for you to keep in mind at the present time? (vv. 13–18; pp. 193–99)
4. Are there any areas in your life where you perceive that the evil one has a particular grip? Is there anyone to whom you can turn for a prayer for deliverance? (pp. 198–99)²
5. What does it mean to pray “in the Spirit”? Practically speaking, what would it mean for you “to pray at every opportunity in the Spirit”? (v. 18; pp. 200, 203)
6. Do you pray for the spread of the gospel and for those with special roles in evangelization and mission? If not, how can you begin to do so in a regular way? For whom should you offer “all prayer and supplication” that God may help their proclamation of the gospel? (vv. 18–20; pp. 200–202)
7. Three of the seven actions or attitudes that Paul recommends for spiritual combat relate directly to evangelization—*readiness* to proclaim the gospel of peace, *the sword of the Spirit*,

2. Whatever your answer, you can learn more about freedom from spiritual evil by reading Neal Lozano's *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance from Evils Spirits* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2003).

and *prayer* for “speech” and “boldness” to make the gospel known. How can we place these evangelizing practices more at the center of our lives? (vv. 15, 17–19; pp. 195–98)

8. What strikes you about Paul’s final greetings and the spirit of the relationships among these first Christians? How can these attitudes be ours? (vv. 21–24)