



*Bruce Butler*

This week's devotions are based on chapters 4–6 of the epistle to the Ephesians. Chapters 1–3 lay a foundation for the nature and substance of the church, telling us that we have every spiritual blessing in Christ, that we have the same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead, and that we are now alive with Christ by grace. Paul goes on to describe the reconciling peace God gave to Jews and Gentiles through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, to describe his own transformed life by the grace of Christ, and finally to praise God for his power and love at work in us through Christ Jesus our Lord. Then, and only then, does Paul begin to advise Christians in Ephesians 4–6 how to live in light of who we are as the church.

I live and pastor in Glendora, California, in the shadow of Los Angeles and the San Gabriel mountains. I build relationships at the gym, read books, watch English mysteries and cowboy movies, and hang out with folks. My three adult children live in three different states.

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:1-6*

I used to play the trombone. It's a fairly simple instrument with only one significant moving part. The slide is adjusted up and down its long twin cylinders to change notes and pitch. The simple maintenance I had to do was lubricate the slide or it wouldn't perform as its manufacturer promised or I intended.

We find that lots of things in life need lubrication to work right: engines, locks, hinges, joints. Most of us who have hung out in church long enough realize that even our relationships with one another can cause too much friction if not lubricated with the proper attention, respect, and love.

In Ephesians chapters 1—3 the apostle Paul has told the church that God has blessed it with all it needs to work in unity for the cause of Christ in the world. In today's Bible reading the church is told to "keep the unity of the Spirit," suggesting that unity in the church comes factory-installed by its Creator. What church members need to do, then, is maintain that unity.

Friction in relationships is caused by pride, critical harshness, a quick temper, hostility, and giving up on one another. The Spirit helps us to lubricate our relationships with humility, gentleness, patience, peace, and love. In this way we live up to the high calling we have received as Christians.

Christ's church is created to be unified, to be one. We must have a sense of urgency, yearning, and dedication to Christ and one another to maintain our oneness in Christ.

*SONG: I Love You with the Love of the Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, in home, workplace, and church make me an instrument of your peace as I learn to walk more fully in humility, patience, and love. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:7-16*

When I was a kid, time seemed to go by so very slowly. The school year was long. So were summers, weekends, church services, and drives to Grandma's house. I couldn't figure out why the adults all around me talked about time flying by or not having enough time, because for me time simply crawled along and I had it in super abundance. But then I grew up and understood.

Our childhood immaturity keeps us from seeing much of life beyond our own wants and needs. We are in bondage to self-centeredness, concentrating only on what feels good at the moment. Time is just one more commodity to be used on ourselves. As we grow into maturity, though, we begin to pour ourselves into others and into causes greater than ourselves. Life becomes so full there's never enough time to accomplish all our goals.

In today's Bible reading, Paul informs the church that God's goal in Christ is to fill up the whole universe. To accomplish this he wants us as members of his body to grow up, to build each other up into fully mature believers, and to equip one another for works of service in God's kingdom. Spiritual maturity helps us grow beyond our selfish scheming and feel-good religion that leaves us at the mercy of life's storms.

Are you growing into the full measure of Christ? Are you pouring yourself into others for the sake of the gospel? Are you spending your time on what really matters?

*SONG: I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, have your way with me and do what is necessary to grow me up in the faith. Help me contribute more fully to the work of your body. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:17-32*

On June 17, 2015, a twenty-one-year-old white man entered the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and attended a prayer meeting with a group of African American Christians. At the end of the meeting, Dylann Roof shot nine people dead, including the pastor. Our nation was aghast at such hatred and racial animosity.

The response of the victims' families was bewildering to many as they offered Roof words of forgiveness. They were acting Christian in a world that expected only harsh condemnation in return. They were living like Christ in the face of this tragedy, because they had been "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (v. 24). They were living lives worthy of the calling they had received, living like mature believers in Christ.

In today's Bible reading Paul reminds the Ephesians about the futility and darkness of their thinking before they knew Christ. Now in Christ they have put off their old, corrupt nature and put on the new self with its renewed attitude of mind. We are therefore urged to put off falsehood and put on truth for we are members of one body. We should not steal but work hard so we can be generous givers. We should encourage, not belittle, so we can build others up. Kindness and forgiveness mark our manner, not anger and bitterness, because God has forgiven all of us who call on Christ as Lord.

We have put on the new garments of Christian attitude and action. The Christian's uniform never hangs in the closet.

*SONG: The Bond of Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, heal our nation's racial animosities. May we, the people of God, demonstrate your forgiveness, generosity, encouragement, and love to all. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 5:1-14*

I was born at the beginning of the “summer of love.” The events of 1967 exploded onto the national scene as harbingers of things to come as the sexual revolution came into full expression in America. The sexual revolution declared love to be a license with unlimited boundaries.

The twenty-first-century secular world tells us love is anything we want it to be and can be expressed in any way we want just so long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else. This sounds amazingly ancient, for Paul described the wider society of his day in these terms: “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Ephesians 4:19).

Today’s Bible reading suggests Paul understood full well the times in which he lived. He carefully defined love as “agape,” a word not commonly used in his society. People most often used “eros.” Ephesians 5 helps us put agape love into practice in our own hyper-sexualized world. We are told to imitate Christ’s agape love, which sacrifices self for the other. We must walk in this costly agape love and not settle for cheap sexual or greedy consumer or brash rhetorical imitations that end up costing us everything at final judgment. We are to live as light in the world, in the dignity of goodness, righteousness, and truth, and have no partnership with the fruitless deeds of darkness. Christians are not to mirror the world but live distinctly as a contrast society, pointing the way to genuine life of love.

*SONG: O Perfect Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus Christ, we exchange our many temptations and passions for the one holy passion of Christ-like love. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 5:15-21*

At Quaker Meadow Christian Camp in the Sierra Nevada Mountains there's a hike that requires a certain amount of care. The Garden of Eden is a series of rock pools of clear mountain water surrounded by ferns and giant sequoia trees. But getting there and back is a challenge. Much of the trail is very steep, some of it is quite narrow, and hikers always have to deal with loose footing and the thin air of the high elevation. Hikers must be very careful how they walk this treacherous trail.

In today's Bible reading Paul urges the Ephesians to "be very careful, then, how you live [walk]—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." This was sound advice for the small minority of believers in Jesus as they lived in ancient pagan societies. It's still advisable for Christians today. The past couple of decades we have heard much about post-modern society shifts. More recently we have been hearing about our Western world becoming post-Christian. We need to understand the times in which we live and look for and listen to what God's Spirit is telling us he's doing around us.

We are called to a Spirit-filled walk in this world. The Spirit helps us be wise, discerning, thoughtful, understanding, and pragmatic. We are called away from foolish and reckless living and into a focused life of joyful worship in song. We need to practice thanksgiving, not criticism. Mutual submission should be the theme of our relationships. Life's treacherous trails demand we keep in step with the Spirit.

*SONG: Fill Me Now*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, fill me with your Spirit that I may walk circumspectly, worshipfully, and thankfully in these trying times. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 5:21-26*

My high school marching band experience was a lot of fun but also a lot of hard work. Being part of competitions, interesting bus rides to far-flung locales, and crazy antics of band members were the payoff for the intensity of early morning and after-school practice sessions and hours of practice at home. The one thing that is certain in marching band is that each member must keep in step and tune with everyone else. There's little room for individual marching rights.

Our culture places a very high value on individual rights. We easily get upset if our rights are violated. We fight for our rights. We demand to have things our way. Our demand for individual rights will surely produce shallow community.

Today's Bible reading appeals to Christians "to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Biblical submission is a voluntary yielding of our rights. It's a sacrificial act as it comes from deferring our rights and individual autonomy for the good of others. Paul advises mutual submission be practiced in the home—by wives as they yield themselves to their husbands, and by husbands as they yield themselves in practicing sacrificial, agape love toward their wives. But Paul is addressing the church as well, asking all Christians—married, single, young, old, servant, or master—to submit to one another as members of one body.

We are to emulate Christ who conceded his rights and submitted himself to the cross. Jesus' death and resurrection brings rescue, reconciliation, and peace to all of us selfish, sinful individuals.

*SONG: Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, teach me to lay myself down for the sake of others, to submit myself in reverence for Christ. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 6:1-4*

I live only thirty minutes from Disneyland, which means I get to see family members from across the country who bring their children to enjoy this world-famous amusement park. This year my brother brought his twelve- and eight-year-old sons and my niece brought her seven-year-old son and four-year-old daughter. As a seasoned parent I rather enjoyed watching these parents with their kids, proud of their patience, love, and dedication to influence their children to follow the Lord.

Christian parents, grandparents, and influencers of children must act as Christian disciplers. No matter our individual backgrounds or the quality of the parenting role models we each had, we can adopt and learn the ways of Christ. Then, in reliance upon his values, focus our parenting on evangelizing and discipling the kids in our realm of influence.

In today's Bible reading Paul assumed kids would be in the audience. He tells them to submit themselves in obedience to their parents, not only because it's generally the right thing to do (even pagan societies recognize this) but also what the Lord expects. Paul also addresses fathers, who were the authority in ancient households and charged with the education of their children, to submit to their children's needs to be lovingly, generously, and gently trained and instructed in the ways of the Lord Jesus. Fathers should be careful not to anger or exasperate their kids but instead model Christlikeness.

Our homes are laboratories of discipleship in Christlike living. They are where we learn to walk worthily, lovingly, wisely, and submissively with one another in the Lord Jesus.

*SONG: Happy the Home When God Is There*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, help me wear the mantle of influence with humility and submission to your lordship. Amen.*

—Bruce Butler