

Homiletics Analysis: Ephesians 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Ephesians 6 brings the letter to its culmination in two distinct but unified movements. The first movement (vv. 1–9) completes the household code begun in 5:22, addressing children and parents, then enslaved persons and masters — the two remaining pairs of the three-pair structure. In each case, Paul grounds the relational ethic not in social convention but in the lordship of Christ: children obey “in the Lord” (v. 1); fathers provoke not to anger but raise children in the Lord’s discipline (v. 4); enslaved persons serve “as to Christ” (v. 5); masters remember they themselves have a Master in heaven (v. 9). The household is not merely ordered — it is reoriented by a single governing allegiance.

The second movement (vv. 10–20) is the letter’s doxological and missional climax. Paul commands believers to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (v. 10) — strength borrowed, not generated — and to “put on the whole armor of God” so they can stand against the schemes of the devil. He identifies the true nature of the conflict: not against flesh and blood, but against cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (v. 12). He then unfolds the armor piece by piece — belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit — before closing the armor imagery with a call to persistent prayer in the Spirit for all the saints, and specifically for Paul himself as he proclaims the gospel in chains (vv. 18–20). The chapter closes with commendations of Tychicus and a final benediction of peace, love, faith, and grace (vv. 21–24).

This Text — Intent

God’s intent through Ephesians 6 is to recalibrate the believer’s perception of both everyday life and ultimate conflict. In the household code, the intent is to expose the invisible lordship of Christ as the true ordering principle beneath every human relationship — no sphere of ordinary life is religiously neutral, and every relationship is either lived toward Christ or away from Him. In the armor passage, the intent is to produce alert, equipped, standing, praying believers who understand that the spiritual warfare they are already in — whether they perceive it or not — is real, cosmic, and decisive, and that God has already provided everything needed to withstand it. The passage does not aim to produce anxiety but confidence: stand, therefore. The armor is not assembled from human virtue but received from God. The final call to prayer underscores that the warfare is not won by moral effort but sustained by Spirit-empowered intercession.

Subject Sentence: Christ's lordship reorders every relationship and arms the believer for cosmic conflict.

Primary Claim: God is calling believers to live all of ordinary life — family, work, every relationship — under Christ's lordship, and to stand in the spiritual warfare that frames that life, not by generating strength or virtue, but by receiving the full armor God has already provided and sustaining the fight through prayer.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Household Code (vv. 1–9) — Social Ethics vs. Gospel Transformation

A significant interpretive debate concerns how Paul's household code relates to the surrounding Greco-Roman social order. Some traditions — particularly those with strong social-justice emphases — read the household code primarily as accommodation to existing power structures, with the “in the Lord” qualifier functioning mainly to soften rather than transform social arrangements. On this reading, the code is culturally conditioned in a way that limits its binding force, and the trajectory of the gospel ultimately moves beyond what Paul explicitly permits here.

The Reformed reading *qualifies* this at one level — it is correct that Paul does not mount a direct attack on the institution of slavery, and the code does reflect the household structures of its day. However, the qualifier “in the Lord” (vv. 1, 5, 7) is not decorative accommodation — it is the explosive theological charge that reconfigures every relationship. Masters are reminded they have a Master in heaven who shows no partiality (v. 9). This is not mere moralizing; it is a theological leveling that makes the permanence of any human hierarchy radically provisional. The Reformed reading does not flatten the text's cultural embeddedness but insists that its theological logic — every person accountable to the same Lord — is fully authoritative and transformationally consequential, even if its institutional outworking in the ancient world looked different from later reforms it helped generate.

What to acknowledge: The social-justice reading is right that the “in the Lord” qualifier is not merely decorative — it carries transformational freight. *What to refute:* The conclusion that the code is therefore culturally relativized and not normatively binding misreads how Paul's theological logic functions. The gospel's leveling of master and slave before one Lord is precisely the kind of claim that works from within social structures to reshape and ultimately transform them.

The Armor of God (vv. 10–20) — Spiritual Warfare: Three Competing Frameworks

Three distinct frameworks compete for the armor passage, each with a different center of gravity.

Charismatic/Pentecostal reading: The warfare is primarily experiential and expressed in direct verbal confrontation with demonic forces — spiritual warfare as a specific set of practices, often including territorial spiritual mapping, binding of named spirits, and direct demonic address. This reading draws heavily on vv. 11–12 while reading the armor somewhat loosely. The Reformed reading *acknowledges* that Paul does depict real, personal demonic agency — the “schemes of the devil” (v. 11) and “cosmic powers” (v. 12) are not metaphors for social structures. However, the text must be *qualified*: Paul’s prescribed response is not elaborate demonic confrontation but taking up God’s armor, praying in the Spirit, and declaring the gospel boldly (v. 19–20). The “sword of the Spirit” is the Word of God, wielded not against named territorial spirits but as the proclamation of the gospel. The Pentecostal reading often imports a warfare praxis that the text does not generate.

Liberal/progressive reading: The “powers and principalities” are demythologized into social, political, and institutional forces — structures of oppression, systemic evil, ideological domination. This reading draws on Pauline scholarship emphasizing the political dimensions of ἀρχαί and ἐξουσία. The Reformed reading *qualifies* rather than simply refutes: it is true that Paul’s language elsewhere encompasses both demonic agency and institutional expressions of fallen power. But in vv. 10–20, the personal, cosmic, and ultimately anti-gospel nature of the conflict is the primary frame. Paul is not calling believers to political engagement here — he is calling them to stand in a spiritual conflict that political engagement alone cannot reach. Reducing “powers and principalities” entirely to social structures evacuates the passage’s call to armor and prayer of their proper object.

Moralist/behavioral reading: A common evangelical pitfall treats the armor passage as an extended metaphor for cultivating Christian virtues — “put on truth” means be a truthful person; “put on righteousness” means live righteously. This domesticates the passage and collapses the eschatological-cosmic framework into character formation. The Reformed reading *refutes* this. The armor is not assembled from human virtue but *received* from God — it is “the whole armor of God” (v. 11, 13). Each piece corresponds to what God has given in Christ: the righteousness is Christ’s imputed righteousness; the gospel of peace is the gospel God has declared; salvation is God’s gift. The believer does not manufacture the armor by moral effort — they take up what God has provided.

The Reformed Verdict: The armor passage depicts a real cosmic conflict against real personal evil, whose principal weapon against God’s people is deception (“schemes of the devil,” v. 11) and whose defeat is secured by appropriating God’s provision in Christ — particularly the gospel-declaration that Christ has already won. The call to “stand” (repeated four times: vv. 11, 13, 13, 14) is the posture of those who hold ground already won by another. Prayer sustains this standing, and bold proclamation of the gospel is the offensive act that advances it.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 3:1–15** — The “schemes of the devil” (v. 11) trace back to the original serpent’s deceptive strategy in the garden; the cosmic conflict Paul depicts in vv. 10–12 has its origin here, and the “enmity” promised in v. 15 is precisely the warfare believers now inhabit.
- **Isaiah 59:17 / Isaiah 11:4–5** — The divine warrior imagery Paul draws on in vv. 14–17 is grounded in the Old Testament portrait of God Himself arming for battle; Paul’s armor is the armor of God because it is the armor *God wears* — the believer fights in borrowed divine equipment.
- **Colossians 2:13–15** — The cosmic powers and authorities of Ephesians 6:12 are the same defeated powers Paul describes in Colossians: Christ “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them in him.” The believer stands on already-won ground.
- **Romans 13:12–14** — Paul’s parallel call to “put on the armor of light” and “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” establishes that the armor imagery is fundamentally Christological — to take up the armor is to appropriate Christ Himself as the believer’s covering and strength.
- **1 Peter 5:8–9** — Peter’s parallel warning — “your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion” — confirms that the spiritual warfare Paul addresses is a universal condition of the church, not a special circumstance; the response (resist, firm in faith) parallels Paul’s command to stand.

Aim: To show that the same lordship of Christ that reorders every human relationship also provides complete resources for the cosmic conflict believers are already engaged in — so that hearers neither shrink from the warfare nor attempt to fight it on their own terms.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–3	Children commanded to obey parents “in the Lord” — first commandment with a promise (Deut. 5:16); long life in the land tied to honoring parents	“In the Lord” is the theological charge; obedience is not mere socialization but a response to Christ’s lordship; Paul cites the fifth commandment directly
4	Fathers charged not to	The word is <i>paideia</i> —

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	provoke children to anger but to raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord	formative training; the father is not master of the household in autonomous terms but steward under the Lord's authority
5–7	Enslaved persons commanded to obey earthly masters “as you would Christ” — not by way of eye-service but from the heart, as serving the Lord	The threefold repetition of Christ-reference (vv. 5, 6, 7) is striking; the theological logic: every task performed under human authority is simultaneously performed before divine authority
8	Promise: whatever good anyone does, enslaved or free, they will receive back from the Lord	Eschatological justice — the Lord sees and rewards what human masters miss or ignore
9	Masters commanded to do the same to enslaved persons — threatening replaced by remembering their own Master in heaven who shows no partiality	The most socially explosive line in the code: no partiality — the master has no leverage before God that the enslaved person lacks
10	Command: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”	Passive/imperative construction — strength is received, not generated; in the Lord, not from within
11	Command: “Put on the whole armor of God” — purpose: to stand against the schemes of the devil	“Whole” armor (<i>panoplia</i>) — the complete set; “schemes” (μεθοδεῖα) — deliberate strategies, not random attacks
12	Identification of the true enemy: not flesh and blood but rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places	This verse reframes every previous conflict in the letter — the hostility between Jew and Gentile, the deceptions of false teaching, the patterns of darkness — all have a supernatural dimension
13	Repeated command: “take up the whole armor of God”	“Evil day” — the present eschatological age of

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
14	— purpose: to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand Belt of truth buckled; breastplate of righteousness in place	conflict; “stand” is the posture, not advance but holding what has been won Truth as the coherent center that holds everything together; righteousness — most naturally Christ’s imputed righteousness covering the heart
15	Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace	Gospel-readiness as the footing for movement — not aggression but stable, mobile gospel-bearing
16	Shield of faith — to extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one	Faith as active trust that intercepts the accusations and deceptions the enemy fires; “all” — no dart gets through
17a	Helmet of salvation	Salvation as the protection of the mind — assurance of God’s saving purpose guards against doubt and despair
17b	Sword of the Spirit — the Word of God	The only offensive weapon in the list; the Spirit wields the Word; proclamation is the advance
18–20	Call to prayer: pray in the Spirit at all times, for all the saints, and specifically for Paul — that he may boldly declare the mystery of the gospel in his chains	Prayer is not a seventh piece of armor but the atmosphere in which the armor is worn; “all times, all prayer, all saints” — the scope is total; Paul requests boldness, not release from chains
21–22	Tychicus commended as the bearer of this letter and the bringer of news about Paul	Personal register — the cosmic letter lands in concrete relationship
23–24	Benediction: peace, love, faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; grace to all who love our	Final blessing mirrors the letter’s opening; “incorruptible” love — the love that endures because

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible	its source is not human sentiment

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–9	Christ’s Lordship Reorders Every Household Relationship
2	10–13	The Real Conflict: Stand in God’s Strength Against Cosmic Powers
3	14–17	The Full Armor: God’s Provision for the Believer’s Standing
4	18–20	The Sustaining Discipline: Prayer in the Spirit for All the Saints
5	21–24	Personal Commendation and Final Benediction

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Christ’s lordship reorders every relationship and arms the believer for cosmic conflict.

Primary Claim: God is calling believers to live all of ordinary life — family, work, every relationship — under Christ’s lordship, and to stand in the spiritual warfare that frames that life, not by generating strength or virtue, but by receiving the full armor God has already provided and sustaining the fight through prayer.

Applications (Five)

1. The lordship of Christ reaches into the parts of your life you have not yet given Him. (*Mind/Belief*) The household code does not address exotic religious experiences — it addresses the room your child is in, the workstation where you spend forty hours a week, the relationship where you hold authority over someone else. The theological move Paul makes is simple and devastating: Christ is Lord *there*, in that room, at that desk, in that power differential. Most believers have unconsciously carved out a secular zone where the

ordinary rules apply and Christ's claims feel abstract. Ephesians 6:1–9 eliminates that zone. Ask: where in your ordinary relational life are you acting as if Christ is not Lord? Name the room. Name the relationship. The application is not “try harder to be Christlike” — it is “Christ is already Lord here; live as if that is true.”

2. You are in a spiritual war whether or not you have chosen to notice it. (*Mind/Belief*)

Paul does not invite believers to enter a spiritual war — he identifies the war they are already in. Verse 12 is not a new assignment; it is a diagnosis. The disorientation, the deception, the persistent accusations that undermine faith, the recurrence of the same defeats — these have a dimension most believers have not named. The Reformed believer is not superstitious about demonic activity, but Paul's language is precise: “schemes” (v. 11) — deliberate, patient, strategic. Acknowledging the real nature of the conflict is not the same as being controlled by fear of it. In fact, the failure to acknowledge it produces something worse: believers fighting flesh-and-blood opponents — other people, institutions, circumstances — when the real enemy is behind them. Name the real enemy. Don't fight the wrong battle.

3. Stop trying to manufacture strength for a fight that only God's armor can win.

(*Affections/Worship*) The command is “be strong in the Lord” — not “be strong.” The armor is “the whole armor of God” — not the armor of the disciplined Christian. Every piece of armor Paul describes corresponds to something God has given: His truth, Christ's righteousness, His gospel, His salvation, His Word. The believer who enters each day trying to summon sufficient spiritual strength from within will be exhausted, defeated, and eventually despairing — not because they lack dedication but because they are trying to fight with weapons they do not possess. The affectional application here is one of release and reorientation: worship the God who has already armed you. Receive what He has given. The rest is not passivity — it is the opposite of self-reliance, which is a form of pride. Come before God each morning as one who is armed by Another, and let that produce gratitude and confidence rather than anxiety.

4. Fathers — the word the Lord uses for your role with your children is not “provider” or “authority” but “trainer.” (*Will/Behavior*)

The word in verse 4 is *paideia* — formative training in the Lord's instruction. The contrast is not between strictness and permissiveness but between raising children to comply with your preferences and raising children to know the Lord. This is concrete: fathers who do not themselves read Scripture, pray, lead family worship, or articulate the gospel to their children are abdicating the precise role Paul assigns. The command not to “provoke to anger” is related — harsh, shame-based discipline without gospel framing produces either rebellion or performance, never faith. The behavioral application is specific: what are you doing, deliberately and consistently, to bring your children under the discipline and instruction of the Lord? Not what are you hoping happens — what are you doing?

5. Pray for the gospel to be proclaimed boldly — starting with your own boldness.

(*Will/Behavior*) Paul's request is striking: he is in chains, he is the greatest gospel-proclaimer of the first century, and what he asks for is not release but boldness (v. 19–20).

The prayer request redefines what success in spiritual warfare looks like — not freedom from difficulty but faithfulness in the middle of it. The behavioral application is a challenge to the prayer life: most believers pray for comfort, resolution, and relief. Paul asks to be prayed for so that he might *speak*. Pray specifically for gospel boldness — your own, and that of those who are preaching and teaching in your hearing. Pray for missionaries in dangerous places not primarily for their safety but for their boldness. Pray for your own next conversation where the gospel could be named. This is not incidental — Paul frames it as the climax of the warfare section.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ephesians 6 teaches that the lordship of Christ is comprehensive and non-compartmental — it extends to every human relationship and into every domain of ordinary life, and it simultaneously positions the believer within a cosmic conflict whose true nature is spiritual, not social or political. The chapter grounds both the household ethics and the warfare section in the same theological reality: the supremacy of one Lord before whom every other authority is derivative, accountable, and temporary. The armor passage in particular teaches something essential about the nature of spiritual provision: God does not call the believer to generate resources for the conflict but to take up what He has already provided — which means every piece of the armor is, in some sense, an aspect of the gospel itself. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word are not virtues to be cultivated in isolation but gifts already given in Christ, now to be appropriated for standing.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ephesians 6 is a concentrated expression of several doctrines central to Reformed theology. The household code displays the Reformation's insistence on the dignity of ordinary callings — *coram Deo* ("before God") is not a monastery category but an "in the Lord" category that sanctifies every human relationship and task. Luther's two-kingdoms insight and Calvin's teaching on vocational holiness find a Pauline grounding here: the enslaved person serving "as to the Lord" is engaged in an act of worship. The armor passage displays the Reformed instinct that grace is always received, never generated — the armor belongs to God before it belongs to the believer, and "being strong in the Lord" is structurally identical to being saved by grace through faith: the resource is external, the posture is receptive, and the standing is secured by Another. The repeated command to "stand" — not advance, not achieve — echoes the Reformation's *simul justus et peccator* posture: the believer is not marching to earn ground but holding ground already won at the cross. Finally, the centrality of the Word as the only offensive weapon and prayer as the sustaining atmosphere reflects the Reformed priority of Word and Spirit working together in the church's life.

Main Takeaway

Christ's lordship is not a Sunday category — it covers the room where your child is, the desk where you work, and the cosmic conflict you are in right now whether you know it or not. You do not have to manufacture strength for that conflict: God has already provided everything you need to stand. Take it up. Pray in the Spirit. Hold the ground Christ has won.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the household code as timeless social hierarchy without its theological charge.** The “in the Lord” qualifier is not decorative — it is the theological load-bearing element that transforms every command. Preachers who focus on the structure of the code (obey, serve, honor) without the Christ-reorientation miss what makes Paul's ethics distinctively Christian rather than simply conventional. Equally, preachers who avoid the household code because of its social complexity miss the opportunity to show how Christ's lordship operates *within* real human power structures to subvert, reorder, and ultimately transform them.
- **Treating the armor as a list of virtues to cultivate.** The most common mishandling of vv. 14–17 is the self-help reading: put on truth by being more honest, put on righteousness by living more purely, etc. This domesticates the armor into a character-improvement program and loses the cosmic-conflict frame. Each piece of armor is God's provision in Christ — it is received by faith, not assembled by effort. Preach the armor as gospel, not as discipline.
- **Minimizing or maximizing demonic agency.** Two equal and opposite errors attend the warfare passage. The first reduces “powers and principalities” to social structures or psychological dynamics and loses the real personal agency of the adversary that Paul explicitly names. The second fills the passage with an elaborate warfare praxis — naming territorial spirits, binding demons, deliverance protocols — that the text does not generate and that can produce both pride and fear. Paul's prescribed response is: stand, take up the armor, pray. Keep the exposition inside those boundaries.
- **Preaching “stand” as passivity.** The command to “stand” (vv. 11, 13, 13, 14) should not be preached as “do nothing and let God handle it.” Standing is an active, costly posture — it is the discipline of holding ground under assault when everything in you wants to retreat, accommodate, or capitulate. The Christian who is standing in truth when deception is fashionable, standing in righteousness when moral compromise is normalized, standing in the gospel when it is unwelcome — that person is not passive. Preach the active costliness of standing.

- **Treating vv. 18–20 as an appendix to the armor rather than its climax.** Prayer is not a footnote after the armor illustration is complete. It is the atmosphere of the whole — “praying at all times in the Spirit” wraps the armor passage as its sustaining discipline. The specific prayer request for boldness to proclaim the gospel (vv. 19–20) identifies the offensive purpose of everything Paul has described: the armor is worn so that the gospel can be spoken. A sermon on Ephesians 6 that does not arrive at bold gospel proclamation as the point of the whole section has stopped short.
- **Separating Ephesians 6 from the letter’s prior argument.** The household code lands in a community that has already been taught the mystery of Jew-Gentile unity in Christ, the new humanity, and the walk worthy of the calling. The “stand” in v. 14 is not a generic exhortation — it is the final expression of “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (4:1) and “walk as children of light” (5:8). The warfare is not a separate topic added at the end — it is the revelatory frame for why everything Paul has commanded in chapters 4–6 is so contested and so costly. Preach chapter 6 as the destination of the whole ethical section, not as a separate unit.