

Final Encouragement

Ephesians 6:21-24

We have finally come to the end of our study in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. We have said that the great theme of Ephesians is the eternal purpose of God, to sum up all things in Jesus Christ. It is the glory of Jesus Christ demonstrated in His church. Remember that Ephesians falls into two halves. Chapters 1-3 reveal our exalted position with Christ in the heavenly places (2:4-6). This is the doctrinal section where Paul outlines who we are in Christ. The second half in chapters 4-6 shows us how to live in Christ (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), as we stand firm against the evil forces of darkness in the heavenly places (6:10-20). Chapters 1-3 describe our spiritual wealth, chapters 4-6 our spiritual walk. The first half shows the position of the believer in Christ, the second shows the practice of the believer in Christ. Our position in Christ and our walk in this world as we stand victoriously against these evil forces demonstrate God's eternal purpose, to sum up all things in Christ.

These last few verses in chapter 6 are Paul's conclusion and benediction. We're probably tempted to skim over these last verses without much thought, but there is a lot of solid theology here. This benediction varies from Paul's usual form, which suggests that it was not just a throwaway close to this letter. Paul wanted his readers to think about it.

21 But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you;

22 whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts.

23 Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

Four key words in Paul's benediction have played a key role in the message of Ephesians. They are more than Paul's wish; they are also his prayer, and his encouragement to us:

Encouragement #1: PEACE (v.23a).

One of the main thrusts in Ephesians is that through the cross of Jesus Christ, we have peace with God and peace with those from whom we formerly were alienated (2:11-22). We have peace with God because the blood of Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. Drawing near to God is not a matter of being religious. The Jews had been as religious as any-one could be, but their religion was not good enough to reconcile them to God. Also, the good news is that being a sinful pagan who has never darkened the door of a church does not mean that there is no hope for you ever to be reconciled to God. Rather, as Paul has shown, the blood of Christ has made it possible for both non-religious pagans and religious

Jews to draw near to God through faith in Jesus.

But this peace with God through the cross of Christ also reconciles groups that formerly were alienated from one another. As Paul wrote (Eph. 2:14), **"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation."** For Paul, a large part of the glory of the church is that the church is the place **"where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all,"** (Col 3:11).

This means that a racist church is not compatible with the New Testament church! If you have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord, every other person who has trusted in Christ is your brother or your sister. As various ethnic groups, different economic groups, and both genders live in visible peace with one another in the church, it is a testimony to the world of Christ's saving grace.

Ephesians emphasizes the vital importance of the church and our unity in Christ. As Paul said (1:23), the church is Christ's body, **"the fullness of Him who fills all in all."** If Christ loved the church and gave Himself for the church as His bride (5:25-27), then we must love the church and give ourselves for her. True, she is not yet glorified, without spot or blemish. Yes, you may get wounded in the church. But, yes, you must commit yourself to that to which Christ is committed. You can't say, "I love Jesus, but I hate His bride." Or, "I love the Head, but His body stinks!"

Relationships in the church are extremely important to God. This is the main thrust of Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:4-11, and 4:1-6:9. It's not a minor theme! Remember, in that culture, Jews and Gentiles were completely alienated from one another. But the church was to demonstrate the saving grace of God, who reconciled these two humanly incompatible groups into one new man. It is vital that we work through relational differences and show the world the love of Jesus Christ through our reconciled relationships.

Ephesians 4:3-6 tells us to be **"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."** I pray for you beloved that you have peace with God, the peace of God and peace with others in the body of Christ.

Encouragement #2: LOVE (v.23b).

Love has been another major theme throughout Ephesians. It appears some 14 times and 7 of those times it refers to our love for one another.

Peace and love go hand in hand (Eph. 4:1-3). Right before Paul urges us **"to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,"** He instructs us to be **"bearing with one another in love,"** (Eph 4:2). God's love for us is the example for our love for one another (5:1-2). Our homes should radiate the self-sacrificing love of Christ between husbands and wives, and parents and children (5:22-6:4). In the church, we must work at building and maintaining loving relationships

between one another (4:31-5:2).

Encouragement #3: FAITH (v.23c).

We are to have **"love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."** Faith too is a primary topic throughout the letter, used 8 times in 8 verses. **"Faith"** is such a well used word that we sometimes forget what it means. Genuine faith has two elements: *belief* and *trust*. Paul wants us to have a strong and growing BELIEF in the truths of the Bible. Then as we learn to believe we are to TRUST in what we have learned about God.

What you believe is extremely important. Paul would not have spent the first three chapters of Ephesians laying the doctrinal foundation if doctrine were not crucial for your Christian life! *What* you believe determines *how* you live. If you claim to believe the gospel but live as the world lives, it proves that you really do *not* believe the gospel. We live in a day when many professing Christians have belittled doctrine as irrelevant or even as divisive. While truth necessarily divides, we should hold to the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

In Galatians 5:6, Paul writes, **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."** To paraphrase, *"The outward keeping of religious rituals is not the main thing, but rather, faith that works itself out in deeds of love."* As Christians, we need a growing faith in Jesus Christ that will move us toward self-sacrificing love for one another.

We should ask for one another and for ourselves, that God would increase our peace, love, and faith. And finally he encourages us toward grace.

Encouragement #4: GRACE (v.24).

Grace is the first word of greeting in the letter and the last word of benediction. It has been used 12 times in 12 verses.

There is no greater wealth than God's grace. What you have in the grace of God is worth more than anything this world has to offer. God's grace is an inexhaustible storehouse. Ephesians 1:7-8 said that God has redeemed us and forgiven our sins, **"according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us."** Grace is God's "unmerited favor," the undeserved blessing He gives to men. The greatest expression of God's grace is of course our salvation. 2:5 and 2:8 tell us **"by grace you have been saved."** And 2:7 tells us why, **"that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** In 3:2 & 8 and in 4:7 we saw that the only way we can serve Christ is because of His grace.

The gospel of grace is a life-transforming message. Whether you are from a religious background, as the Jews in Ephesus were, or from a pagan background, as the Gentiles were, believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord drastically changed your life.

When we studied the background of this letter we saw many of the people in Ephesus were heavily involved in the occult (Acts 19:18-19). Many had engaged

in immorality at the famous Temple of Artemis or Diana in Ephesus. But when they came to Christ, they burned their occult books and they abandoned their immorality (Eph. 5:3-12). God created them anew in righteousness and holiness of the truth (4:24).

Granted, this transformation works itself out gradually, as we lay aside the old life, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new life (4:22-24). But those who have been saved by grace embark on this new life of transformation in holiness.

We need to pray for one another and ourselves that we would experience His grace more and more. Paul wishes this grace for **"all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."** Jesus told the Pharisee that the greatest commandment is **"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."** (Mat.22:37).

I have loved my wife now with an undying love for over 28 years now. I certainly haven't done that perfectly. In fact, at times, I've totally blown it. But looking back I think that overall I can honestly say that I have loved her with an undying love for all these years.

For some of you, your undying love for Jesus may be very young. You've just started to learn how to love Him, but you really do love Him with all your heart and day by day you work to get to know Him and love Him better.

For others, you've loved Jesus for a long time. Sure, you've blown it along the way – maybe many times. But you really do love Him and your love for Him doesn't look the same as it did when you first loved Him. For all of us who have been here for this whole series in Ephesians, I pray that all of us can honestly say that our love for Jesus is more mature than it was when we started. If not, then perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we really do love Jesus with an undying love.

I also know that it is very possible that there are some of you here who would honestly have to say that you've never had that love relationship with Jesus. Maybe you never even considered that you needed to do that before today. Or maybe you've known about Jesus for a long time, but you cannot say you have a love relationship with Him. If you would like to know more about what it means to receive the love of Jesus, I would love to talk with you more about that.