

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 28

Peace And Grace
December 15th, 2013
Ephesians 6:21-24
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Ephesians 6:21-24. This is our 28th and final message in our series on Paul's Letter To The Ephesians. We started way back on April 28th and with just a few breaks we have now reached the conclusion of our 7.5 month journey through this marvellous description of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our appropriate response. As with all of Paul's letters he takes great care in crafting the concluding paragraph. PhD theses have been written on the postscripts and closings of Paul's letters. Very often he uses a standard prayer and benediction that is slightly tweaked and adjusted to summarize and reflect the main themes he has covered in the body of the epistle; and we see that same pattern here. This has been a letter about peace with God and others through Christ and it has been about the lavish, unexpected, entirely unwarranted grace of God and it is to these same themes that Paul returns in this letter's closing. There are two sections in this paragraph, each two verses in length; first there is a very practical section where Paul commends an emissary to their care and reception and then there is his closing prayer and benediction. We'll read the text in full and then deal with it according to those divisions. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

²¹So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. (Ephesians 6:21-24. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A lot of us tend to skip over or skim through these endings as if they have nothing to teach us and I think that is a mistake. Every word of Scripture is inspired and useful – amen? And so it is here. In verses 21-22 we see the Apostle Paul commending faithful and useful leaders to his people – this is so important!

A Good Leader Commends To His People Other Faithful And Useful Leaders

This was a common practice of the Apostle Paul. At the end of Romans for example, he says:

¹I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. (Romans 16:1. ESV)

We don't know a great deal about Phoebe; unlike Tychicus, she is only mentioned once in the New Testament and that without a great deal of context. What we know is that she was called a deaconess by Paul – that is the word translated as “servant” in verse 1, and that he considered her a valuable co-worker in the ministry. As a side note, we are very quick to get agitated at Paul's teaching that women were not to be the public preachers in the church and very slow to recognize that unlike other religious men of his day, Paul had no hesitation in accepting and commending women as co-workers in Gospel mission. We don't know what kind of ministry Phoebe did, some sort of deacon type ministry obviously, but we know that Paul thought highly of her and wanted the church in Rome to support her. He essentially says: “Put this missionary on your support list – I vouch for her”.

At the end of 1 Corinthians he endorses Stephanos to some sort of position of leadership – whether he was to be an elder or Paul is just lifting him up as an example is unclear. At the end of 1 Thessalonians he commends the elders they already have. He says:

¹²We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. ESV)

We don't know why he felt the need to say that; whether these elders were new believers and struggling to command the respect of the church or whether they were men Paul put there who

were relatively unknown to the church – we don't know, we just know that one of the things Paul regularly did is recommend leaders that he felt were trustworthy and faithful.

Here in Ephesians Paul is recommending a young man named Tychicus. We actually know a fair bit about this person because he is mentioned 5 times in the Bible¹. He might be the most important person in the New Testament that you've never heard of. Alongside of people like Timothy and Titus he appears to have been one of the handful of men that Paul was training for pastoral ministry. In fact it appears that he may have replaced at one time or another, both Titus and Timothy in their ministry assignments. When Paul was in prison near the end of his life it appears that he called Timothy to him from Ephesus and sent Tychicus there as his replacement. We see that in 2 Timothy 4:

⁹Do your best to come to me soon.... Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹²**Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus**. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. (2 Timothy 4:9-13. ESV)

Earlier it seems that Paul intended to have him pastor in Crete after Titus:

¹²**When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you**, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. (Titus 3:12. ESV)

We don't know which man actually did replace Titus at Crete but from these references it is clear that Tychicus was one of the pastors that served under Paul's direction in his many churches.

To understand what was going on we have to remember that in those early days of the church, most congregations were very small and they were also very local. Some historians estimate that there were likely only a handful of larger churches in the first generation and that the vast majority of congregations were of less than 50 people. By reading of the church planting journeys undertaken by Paul in Acts we get the picture of a bunch of small churches clustered around a larger urban centre most of which would only have had local elders overseeing the work. They would read letters from Paul that they shared around and offer what applications and explanations they could. A pastor might be assigned to the mother church in the larger centre such as Timothy in Ephesus. He would train and resource those local elders. Additionally, Paul

¹ In addition to this passage in Ephesians 6 he is mentioned in Acts 20:4, Colossians 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:12 and Titus 3:12.

might send around travelling teachers and preachers – perhaps we might call them pastoral interns – who would preach in the branch churches. Tychicus is one of those people. Here it seems that he was the emissary of the Apostle Paul who was sent to deliver his letter to all the churches around Ephesus. He later served the same function with Paul's Letter to the Colossians. Paul wanted the churches to receive him and to listen both to his updates on Paul's ministry and his own messages of exhortation.

The point of all this is that Paul was very concerned to ensure that the local churches received a steady diet of orthodox preaching and so he took pains to recommend good teachers and also to warn against false teachers. Paul had no problem naming names. He wrote to Timothy saying:

¹⁶But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. (2 Timothy 2:16-17. ESV)

He had previously warned Timothy about Hymenaeus and another false teacher named Alexander, so Paul obviously had no problem naming names. He recommended good teachers and he warned against false teachers. Wise pastors and elders still do the same.

This is incredibly important in our day. Because of the internet and Television, you have access to some of the best Bible teachers in the history of the church! You also have access to some of the wildest heretics to every set foot on planet earth. Can you tell them apart? If John Piper and Joel Osteen are your two favourite preachers – you have a serious problem. There is a discernment issue there. You can't like both of those teachers simultaneously. That's like saying the two greatest composers of all time are J.S. Bach and the guy who wrote for Twisted Sister – something is not right there. Some Christians today are dizzyingly undiscerning. They are drinking indiscriminately from the fire hose of the internet and television and they are sucking up an awful lot of poison as a result. Today in your bulletin, just in time for Christmas, is a list of recommended teachers and writers. I've put this out before and we'll put it out again because this is important. I've asked two of our elders to review this list, so you can trust that this list is ELDER APPROVED. Please also notice who is recommended and who is not. I've put the obvious heretics on there but I would also say that if you have a favourite teacher or author whose name isn't on either of those lists, please check with me before you start listening to one of their sermons every day as you drive to work. There are a few characters out there – even in

the reformed evangelical world – who are orthodox but dangerous. They are living without accountability, they are famous beyond their competence or in a few cases, they are orthodox in theology but not in lifestyle – that’s why they are not on the list. EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION. You are what you eat and that applies to spiritual food as much as to physical.

Good leaders recommend good preachers and teachers to their people and church members are ultimately responsible for who they receive, who they support and who they listen to.

Alright, let’s move on to the second part of Paul’s closing paragraph. Perhaps it would be useful to read it again:

²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. (Ephesians 6:21-24. ESV)

In this closing section we have a prayer for peace and a benediction of grace – two words that together summarize the entire message of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. First of all then, let’s look at his closing prayer for peace.

A Prayer For Peace

²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV)

As I mentioned last week, we define a word by consulting the context to see how that word has been previously used. Peace of course, might refer to the absence of conflict, it might refer to physical ease, it might refer to any number of things and so we want to remember how the Apostle Paul has been using this word peace. Flip back in your Bibles to chapter 2; look at Ephesians 2:11-17:

¹¹Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴**For he himself is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself **one new man** in place of the two, **so making peace**. ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached **peace** to you who were far off and **peace** to those who were near. (Ephesians 2:11-17. ESV)

Paul is saying in this paragraph that in the New Covenant God is doing a new and exciting thing! He is doing a work of new creation. He has made one new man – one new Adam; in the same way that Israel was the new Adam, the new humanity under the Old Covenant, now in the New Covenant, to faithful Israel is added Gentiles who also put faith in Christ. The New Covenant in Christ, therefore, is about reconciliation with God and reconciliation to people from every tribe, tongue, language and nation. Peace, in Ephesians, is peace with God and peace within the Body of Christ. It is about new status and new relationships. When you become a Christian you become a son or daughter of God and you also become brother and sister to us. There is no believing in God without belonging to us – both of those ideas are tied up in what the Apostle Paul means when he uses the word ‘peace’.

Therefore, to pray “peace” to you brothers, is to say: “Grow in your intimacy and knowledge of God and grow in your fellowship one with another.” This seems to be what he is getting at when he says next:

and love with faith.... (ESV)

Love and faith are words that can legitimately mean many different things and so again we want to recall what Paul has said previously about faith and love in this letter. We remember particularly what he said in chapter 1:15:

¹⁵For this reason, because I have heard of your **faith in the Lord Jesus** and your **love toward all the saints**, ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (ESV)

This is how Paul himself says he regularly prays for them and so as he provides an example of such prayers here at the end of the letter we know exactly how to interpret these words. Paul is praying for them to grow in their faith in Jesus and in their love for one another. I said this before and I’ll say it again, I am so thankful that according to the Bible a church does not have to choose between orthodox Gospel theology and loving Christian fellowship. You can pursue BOTH with equal vigour. You should pursue both with equal vigour. I reject entirely the idea that truth is not loving, I reject entirely the idea that preaching an orthodox, historical Gospel will somehow make your church feel unloving to new people. I reject that view in the strongest terms possible because the Bible rejects that view in passage after passage in both the Old and New

Testament. Truth is loving. Gospel is loving. Telling people that all have sinned and are damned to hell apart from Christ IS THE MOST LOVING THING YOU COULD EVER DO!! Teaching people the whole Gospel – telling them about God’s majesty and Sovereignty, telling them about human guilt and sinfulness, telling them about God’s grace in Jesus Christ, telling them about the appropriate response of gratitude and how the salvation of sinners and the condemnation of rebels will ultimately BOTH serve the glory of God is the most loving ministry we can commit to as a church. I believe that. I care about all human suffering – ESPECIALLY ETERNAL SUFFERING² so I want us to grow in our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I want us to grow in our faith. Simultaneously, I want us to grow in our love for one another. I likewise reject the idea that the only pure love is the love for the lost. I reject the idea entirely that a mature Christian spends most of his or her time loving the stranger and the lost and that love for fellow believers is second class and even potentially selfish and inappropriate. I reject that in the strongest terms possible because the Bible rejects it in the strongest terms possible. That we are to prioritize the love of the saints – the love of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ – is one of the most clearly and commonly taught doctrines in Holy Scripture. Paul says commends them in chapter 1 for their:

love toward all the saints, (Ephesians 1:15. ESV)

In Galatians 6 he says:

¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10. ESV)

Jesus says that the very proof that we are his true disciples is that we love one another. He said that in prose and he said it in parable in case we can only receive truth in one form or the other:

³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35. ESV)

For those who can only learn through story he told the parable of the sheep and the goats and he drove the meaning home to them by saying:

² I attribute this saying to John Piper. This is a well known “Piper-ism” but I don’t know where it originally came from.

‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to **one of the least of these my brothers**, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:40. ESV)

It is absolutely undeniable that according to the Scriptures your first and primary obligation to love, humanly speaking, is owed to your brother and your sister in Christ. At this church we do an awful lot of really good stuff to love the people of the City of Orillia. So we should. Let our good deeds ADORN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST! Let’s keep on with that and let’s do even better in 2014 by the grace of God and should the Lord tarry. But let’s pick up our game when it comes to loving one another.

I want to lay a challenge down for you. Last week people seemed to enjoy my practical challenge to write the Gospel in 100 words so here is another very practical challenge. This Christmas, if you are a member of this church, I challenge you to give an anonymous gift to a fellow member of this church who you perceive to be in need. Here those words carefully: MEMBER and ANONYMOUS. If your offended by that and think that Christians loving Christians or members loving members is a bit self serving, I can tell you that if you don’t tell these people to love one another they will only love you and they will spend themselves into the poor house to do it. I have no doubt of this church’s commitment to loving the lost so I’m telling you to love one another. There are working class families in this church – you know them, they serve in the nursery, they teach your kids in Jr. High, they serve in the kitchen at Family Foundations and for Seniors, they cook, they clean and they SERVE THEIR TAILS OFF and they never ask for anything. Some of them are single parents. Some of them tithe even though it means doing without family vacations or braces for the kids or buying a new car. These people are the salt of the earth and they are the least of these my brethren. I challenge you to give something anonymously to one of those families. If you are not sure who is a member and who isn’t, call the office, Susan knows everything. She’ll tell you. I want the people of this city to look at this church and not just note our charity, I want them also to see our love for one another. Let’s make this church a city on a hill.

Before we move on to the benediction of grace notice also that the source of peace and the source of our love and faith is of course:

God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 6:23. ESV)

We remember this from chapter 1.

²Grace to you and **peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. (Ephesians 1:2. ESV)

Here at the end of his letter, as at the beginning, the Apostle would remind them that all that they have has come FROM the Father, BECAUSE of the Son. Matthew Henry, the great Puritan commentator says it so well:

All grace and blessings are derived to the saints from God, through the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ our Lord.³

Lastly, as Paul closes his letter he does so by offering a short benediction of grace.

A Benediction Of Grace

²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. (Ephesians 6:24. ESV)

Paul closed most of his letters with something very much like this. Perhaps his most famous benediction comes from the end of 2 Corinthians:

¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Corinthians 13:14. ESV)

People like that one because of its explicit Trinitarian wording. All of that to say, we are not surprised that Paul has ended his letter with a benediction of grace. There are two interesting and unique features of this benediction however that are worth noticing. Generally when Paul prays for grace he asks that the grace of God would be “with you all” as per 2 Corinthians 13. He uses the very general second person plural. Here however he casts it in the third person, grace is requested for “all who love our Lord Jesus Christ”, what is the meaning of that change? Many times throughout this series you have heard me say that this letter is laid out in two major sections. The first three chapters describe the grace of God in Christ, the last three chapters talk

³ Matthew Henry, *Acts To Revelation*, Matthew Henry’s Commentary (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1935), 722.

about the appropriate response of the Christian to that unwarranted grace. People who are saved by grace God, respond in loving obedience. Now, here at the end, Paul flips that once more and says: “People who respond with love to the grace of God receive more grace in return.” The response is met with response. God is no man’s debtor. He is an incredible giver and to those who respond to saving grace with loving obedience he heaps fresh grace upon fresh grace. Of course if we are Bible readers that kind of talk is not terribly surprising to us; after all, Jesus said:

¹²For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 13:12. ESV)

The second interesting and unique feature of this benediction is the word at the very end; the ESV renders it as “incorruptible”; in Greek it is the word *aphtharsia*. We know what that usually means, we’re just not sure what it means here. Normally this word is used to describe things that are imperishable but it can also mean “genuine” or “sincere”. Calvin translated it as sincere. He said:

Paul intended to state indirectly, that, when the heart of man is free from all hypocrisy, it will be free from all corruption. This prayer conveys to us the instruction, that the only way of enjoying the light of the Divine countenance is to love *sincerely* God’s own Son, in whom his love toward us has been declared and confirmed.⁴

I like what Calvin sees here. I like the idea that if we want to experience more of God’s grace then we need to work with what God has already supplied to purify our love for Christ. We need to mortify our flesh, we need to seek out and destroy all rivals to our first affection and if we do that, Paul prays for us fresh supply. Brothers and sisters, tear down the idols of your heart such that you may love Christ with a sincere and untainted love and God will bless you with increase, to the praise of his glory and grace. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

⁴ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I&II Thess., I&II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 344.

Series Bibliography

As some of you may know, there has been a bit of a discussion going on in the Evangelical world about pastors and plagiarism. Some pastors whose sermons get made into books have not been as careful with their citations as they ought to have been. Everyone knows that preachers make use of sources in order to make sermons and that it is not necessary, and even unhelpful, for them to verbally footnote every reference or commentary behind each point. Calvin described preaching as being rather like the task of a mother bird chewing up meaty fare for the hungry mouths of her baby chicks⁵. Pastors are supposed to wrestle with sources and then spit out content in a digestible form for their people but the issue has come up as to whether those sources should be credited at least in the written form of the sermons. Whenever I directly quote a source I have footnoted it in the manuscript and will continue to do that. However, in line with the new and more rigorous “best practices” being suggested, I will also carefully note my sources for each preaching series. Of course it will be easier to do that at the end as I won’t be able to anticipate perfectly what sources I will use until I actually write the sermons. Here then is a list of the primary sources I used for the Ephesians series – not counting my Greek New Testament (UBS Third Edition) or the dictionaries I used for every message.

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⁵ I'd love to footnote that for you but can't remember where I first read that!! I know it was itself a footnote to one of Calvin's sermons (I think in his series on Job) but have LONG since forgotten the exact reference. ☺