

Benediction: Peace, Love, Faith, Grace

Ephesians 6:21-24

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So 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. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

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

So, we come this morning to the end of the Book of Ephesians. After laying out the Gospel and its application for all of life in just under 2,500 words, 151 verses, Paul now takes the final four verses to close his letter with a personal note and a benediction. In these final four verses, Paul shows his heart for the personal and spiritual well-being of the Ephesians.

Introduction: Koinonia: Fellowship – Life Together

One thing that is clear from this brief ending to Paul's letter, as is clear in the endings of almost all of his letters, is that Paul was very committed to *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a word which is usually translated as "fellowship." That word has unfortunately taken on a very superficial and social meaning in English. We usually speak of "fellowship" when we are talking about social gatherings or eating food together.

One aspect of fellowship can include eating food together, although it would usually have been a meal in someone's home. Acts 2:42 tells us of the priorities of the early church, saying, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." "Fellowship" here means something distinct from "the breaking of bread," which itself is likely a reference to the Lord's Supper.

"Fellowship" means a common participation together in something. It is a participation together. It refers to the mutual commitment brothers and sisters in Christ make together to the church, to the Gospel and to each other. Believing in Christ means joining in a Gospel kingdom partnership, and a commitment to Christ involves a commitment to one another as partners within the body of Christ.

Here we see Paul's commitment to *koinonia* in his decision to send Tychicus to bring God's blessing and to be God's blessing to the churches in Asia Minor.

I. God's Blessing in Person

So, who is this Tychicus Paul mentions here? Well, he's mentioned five times in the New Testament and was one of the vital leaders of the church in Asia Minor. In Acts 20:4, Tychicus and Trophimus are identified as "the Asians" who accompanied Paul as he was journeying through Macedonia, the northern part of Greece.

Tychicus is also mentioned at the end of Colossians, and in Colossians, he is mentioned as accompanying Onesimus, the runaway slave who was going back to his former master, Philemon. The language in Colossians 4 is similar to what we find here:

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. (Colossians 4:7-9, ESV)

So, it seems like Tychicus was sent by Paul from Rome to Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), where he was from, to carry three very important letters, each of which became a book of the New Testament – Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. He must have been a “faithful minister” indeed to be entrusted with such a great responsibility.

A year or maybe two later, when Paul was writing to Titus on the island of Crete, he indicated that he was going to send either Artemas or Tychicus to relieve Titus in Crete so that Titus could come visit Paul. So Tychicus had apparently visited the churches of Asia Minor to deliver these letters and bring them news of Paul’s situation in Rome and then returned to Paul in Rome, likely to bring him news of how the churches in Asia Minor were doing.

Finally, Tychicus is mentioned in the final chapter of the last letter Paul ever wrote. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul tells Timothy that he is sending Tychicus to Ephesus.

A. Tychicus, Beloved and Faithful

Paul put such trust in Tychicus, which makes sense, since he calls him “*the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.*” We know all about the Apostle Paul, but we literally wouldn’t have some of his letters without beloved and faithful Tychicus. This tells us much about Tychicus himself and about the Apostle Paul.

Paul could’ve hired some courier to deliver his letters. He could have delegated the task to some unimportant person. But instead, he sent a “faithful minister,” someone whom he would trust to relieve Titus in Crete and to minister in Ephesus himself a few years later.

It also tells us something about Tychicus that he was content to be the Apostle Paul’s letter carrier. He had gifts of his own, ability to minister, and yet he repeatedly went where Paul sent him, to do what was needed wherever he was needed, from delivering letters in Asia Minor to ministering on Crete. He was not self-interested but kingdom-minded, and this is what made him faithful.

One final note about Tychicus: The word Paul uses to describe Tychicus that is translated as “minister” is the Greek word for diakonos, or deacon. It is possible that Tychicus was a deacon in the early church, an extraordinarily powerful one, like Phillip or Stephen. This word is used at other times to refer to people who are not deacons; Paul himself uses it to refer to himself. But the use of this word is a reminder of a couple of truths:

1. The office of deacon is an office of ministry. Deacons are minister, who administer God's grace to the church.
2. Ministry is service. The word "diakonos" means servant, one who executes the commands of another. Tychicus clearly served the Apostle Paul and did what Paul needed him to do, but for Paul to use this word of himself is another reminder that we are all servants, called to execute the commands of Another.

B. Knowledge and Encouragement

So, what was Tychicus sent to bring the Ephesians? Two things: knowledge and encouragement. Paul knew that the Ephesians and the rest of the Christians in Asia Minor wanted to know how he was doing. They were concerned about their beloved Apostle and they wanted to know about his health, his prison situation, his prospects for a trial or release, etc.

But what's interesting is why Paul is sending Tychicus is bigger than mere information. Again, he could have just sent a hired messenger with information, but he sent a "beloved brother and faithful minister" because his desire was that Tychicus might encourage the hearts of the Ephesians.

When Paul says, "that he might encourage your hearts," the word he uses for "encourage" is actually *parakaleo*, which is one of the titles of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. It refers to one who is called alongside as a counselor, comforter or encourager, who comes and brings strength, hope and courage. He also comes alongside with authority as a teacher, to instruct and guide.

So we can see that Paul literally wants to see Tychicus be the instrument of the Holy Spirit to the Ephesians, to bring them truth and comfort, knowledge and encouragement, instruction and consolation. He is demonstrating His love for them in concrete ways.

We can learn a lot from Paul here in how to maintain strong fellowship – strong *koinonia* – in the church. Paul knew that we are called to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. He knew that we were called to pray for one another, to love one another, to meet one another's needs, to build one another up and not tear one another down. And so he invested in the well-being of the churches of Asia Minor by writing to them and having his letters hand-delivered by a beloved brother and faithful minister who could encourage their hearts as he delivered the letters. Personal concern, personal communication, costly but face-to-face and person-to-person ministry are the key ingredients that make for strong and healthy *koinonia*.

II. God's Blessing in Words

And then, having told the Ephesians about Tychicus and his ministry mission of Holy Spirit-like encouragement, Paul closes his letter with a double benediction. What is a benediction? It is literally, a good word, or a blessing. It is a kind of prayer in the form of a spoken blessing over a group of people. It's how we end every worship service, that we might be dismissed with His blessing.

This benediction is unusual for two major reasons:

1. It is a double benediction, the first in verse 23 and the second in verse 24.
2. It is also a benediction that reverses the normal word order of two of the key words Paul uses in his letters. Paul's favorite standard benediction of greeting in the opening of his letters is "grace and peace." Paul had opened Ephesians in 1:2 with "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." But here the first closing benediction is "peace" and then the second is "grace." This is significant because, of these two words, grace is the root and peace the fruit. So Paul is putting the fruit first here in this double-benediction.

All total in this double-benediction, Paul seeks to impart four blessings to the Ephesians: peace, love, faith and grace.

A. Peace

First of all, peace here is so much more than just an absence of conflict, though it definitely includes that. Peace is mentioned eight times in this letter, but none is more important than in 2:14-18:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Christ Himself is our peace, who secured peace between us and God by reconciling us to God in His body on the cross. He also makes peace between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and really between all Christians, by reconciling us together to God. Finally, by granting us access to God the Father in the Spirit, Christ is our access to inner peace. Peace with God, peace between Christians in the body of Christ and peace within ourselves as we have access to God – all are secured by Jesus Himself. This good news makes the Gospel the Gospel of Peace.

B. Love

"Peace to the brothers, and love with faith . . ." The second thing Paul blesses the Ephesians with is love. Love is one of the most prominent words in Ephesians, occurring some 20 times in some form this letter. It sometimes refers to God's love for us – "In love, He predestined us" – and sometimes to our love for one another – "bearing with one another in love."

Given the background of how Paul uses these two terms together and given the immediate context here, it seems clear that "love" here in verse 23 refers to the love we as believers are to have for one another. So Paul is desiring more brotherly love to flourish among the Ephesians.

This love is “with faith.” These two things – love and faith – are found together in chapter 1 as the basis for Paul’s thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers. He says, *“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers”*

This makes this benediction here similar to Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 1:11-13: *“Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and **may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all**, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”*

C. with Faith

But Paul also wants to see their love for one another accompanied by faith in the Lord Jesus. Paul seems to consistently view these two as an inseparable pair, linking them together in multiple places in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus.

It seems clear that these are twin graces – that faith in Jesus and love for His people go hand-in-hand. As we believe in Him, we will love His people. As we love His people, it strengthens our faith in Him. Faith is centrally important throughout Ephesians, with “faith” and “faithful” mentioned 10 times in the letter.

D. Grace

The second benediction wishes grace to *“be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”* This, as I said, is the reverse of Paul’s normal “grace and peace” order, because everything in verse 23 depends on the grace of God. The grace of God is the source of every spiritual blessing we receive from Him.

Grace is obviously a central theme throughout Ephesians, mentioned 12 times in this letter. God’s grace is described as “His glorious grace” in 1:6 and Paul refers to “the riches of His grace” in 1:7. Paul tells us that we are saved by grace twice in chapter 2, where he also tells us that God intends to make us trophies of His grace in eternity.

Grace is God’s favor, His kindness, His goodness to us when we deserve the opposite. Grace is the rich blessing of God for sinful rebels who deserve condemnation. Here it is literally “the grace,” meaning the grace of salvation, which includes the grace of perseverance in the faith. Paul likely has this aspect of saving grace in mind, the grace of sanctification, of perseverance. This is what the Ephesians needed, and what we need.

E. Love Incorruptible?

Now you may be troubled by the fact that Paul pronounces this blessing of grace to be with “all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.” Interestingly, though this verse has the 19th and 20th occurrence of the word “love” in Ephesians, this is probably the only place where it refers to our love for Christ.

You might wonder if this blessing applies to you. After all, can you really say with confidence that you love the Lord Jesus with love incorruptible? Sure, Christ’s love for us is incorruptible, but can we say the same thing about our love for Him?

Yes, we can, because our love for Him comes from Him as a gift just as surely as His love for us. Anything incorruptible can only have one source, just as true love can have only one source.

How do we know if we have this love for Christ or not? Luke 7:36-50 is a powerful illustration of what it means to have true love for the Lord Jesus:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”

⁴¹ “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³ Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.” ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” ⁴⁸ And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Now a dangerous way to misunderstand what Jesus is saying is to think that there are some people who need a lot of forgiveness and other people who only need a little forgiveness. That’s not true! But there are those who know they need a lot of forgiveness and there are those who think they only need a little forgiveness. Those who know they need a lot of forgiveness are those who love Jesus greatly, because they understand the depth of their need and the wonder of Christ’s love. These people are forgiven, because they love much; they love much because they have been forgiven much.

Conclusion: From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

I skipped over a very important part of verse 23, which I wanted to save for the end here: “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Everything good we have is a gift from God, and all four of these blessings – peace in all of its dimensions, love for one another, faith in the Lord Jesus, grace, love for Christ that is incorruptible – all if it comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This language echoes how Paul opened Ephesians in 1:2, “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Paul opens and closes this letter by acknowledging that grace and peace and all accompanying blessing and graces – including love and faith – come to us as gifts from God.

This is, in many ways, the main message of the whole book of Ephesians: Salvation, life, grace, peace, faith, love, fellowship, encouragement, spiritual growth – all of these things are gifts from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And our response of love and obedience is the response of a grateful people who love because we have been loved, who forgive because we have been forgiven, who obey because we have been given the grace to obey and who live our lives for the Lord because our lives have been given to us by the Lord!