

PM Ephesians 6:1-24 "Incorruptible Love"

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Preacher: Dr Alistair Mackay

[0 : 00] Together and as promised we're going to read the last part of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 6. And there's a word here for each one of us.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Fathers, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.

Not by the way of eye service as people pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.

Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

[1 : 18] Masters, do the same to them and stop your threatening. Knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven.

And that there is no partiality with him. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.

Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.

And having done all to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth. And having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

[2 : 29] And as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance. Making supplication for all the saints. And also for me. That words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. For which I am an ambassador in chains.

That I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. So that you also may know how I am.

[3 : 37] And what I am doing. Ticius, 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. May God add a blessing to that reading of his word. That phrase, the apple of the eye, is one of the most beautiful in scripture.

It refers of course to the pupil in the center of your eye. And if you look into a mirror.

[4 : 49] You find that the apple of your eye is the only part of your body that reflects. And if you look in a mirror. You will see your own pupil.

And you in there. And it is a wonderful way that when God keeps us as the apple of the eye. It is so intensely personal and close and near.

It is just a beautiful way of thinking of our saviour's love. We are going to think a wee bit about the end of the book of Ephesians.

Now I am sure the apostle Paul had no intention of being unclear when he signed off this letter. But if we glance at the various translations of the Bible. We see that the very last verse in Ephesians 6. That can be taken two ways.

[6 : 05] Either undying or incorruptible can refer to the love which the brethren, the Ephesian church family, have for the Lord.

Or it may be taken to refer to the grace of God. Which Paul wishes will be that church family's portion.

May God's grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Both are wonderful prayers. The richness of what we have in those last two verses of Ephesians 6.

And in the very last word of the book. It's also reflected in the various ways that that very last word can be translated.

The Greek word, the last two words are enafarsia. Literally that means in incorruptibility. And all credit to the ESV version for translating it that way.

[7 : 13] But there are other nuances in that phrase. And other translations say insincerity. That's the King James Version. Eternally, the New Living Translation.

With Undying Love, the Good News Translation. And so does the NIV, the Amplified Bible. Gives both nuances as with undying and incorruptible love.

And the New King James Version sticks to with sincerity. Whatever translation we use. And I'm going to stick with the ESV here. With love incorruptible.

We have a most remarkable phenomenon here. We are fickle, frail and fallible from head to toe. Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We fail our Lord just like Peter did. Time and again. And the good that we would do, we don't do.

[8 : 16] And the evil that we wouldn't do. That's what we end up doing. Just like Paul agonized over. And yet, yet this love that is attributed to the Ephesian church family is incorruptible.

It's undying, eternal, pure, faithful, sincere, unwavering. Simply not called into question. Now or in the future.

So, might we ask if that's the kind of love we have for the Lord Jesus. And if it was the kind of love the Ephesians had for Christ.

Where did they get it from? And can we emulate them? Paul, of course, knew the Ephesians really rather well.

After all, he founded the church. Way back about 53 AD. And that was when he was traveling back to Jerusalem. Towards the conclusion of his second missionary journey.

[9 : 23] But he couldn't keep away from this hotbed of idolatry. To Diana of the Ephesians in Latin. Or Artemis of the Ephesians in Greek. And he spent a long time there.

Compared with other locations in his third missionary journey. And we've got that chronicled in Acts 19, 1-20. Where Paul spent three whole years in Ephesus.

Preaching and teaching the good news about Jesus. Before he passed on to other parts of Asia Minor. Macedonia and Achaia. On his way back to Jerusalem. But he maintained a keen personal interest in the church.

And he appointed Timothy to be their leader. We read about that in 1 Timothy 1, chapter 1, verse 3. And then when he was imprisoned in Rome in the early 60s AD.

Paul wrote this letter. Possibly about 61 or 62 AD. And Tychicus from Ephesus. Who visited Paul in Rome.

[10 : 28] Was commissioned with taking the letter back to his home church. And maybe other Asian churches too. For reading. And now this was no lawyer's letter.

Challenging error and calling the church to heal. And also there was no ultimatum here. No letter declaring faults and giving threats.

It was instead a letter of encouragement. A letter designed and intended to strengthen the faith of those to whom it was read.

And we should view it in this way also. It's really a remarkable six chapters. Which conclude with incorruptible love.

Quite possibly you know them well. And they may contain some of your favourite parts of scripture. They may contain verses which have impacted your own life.

[11 : 29] So that they've been instrumental in bringing you to faith. That indeed was so with myself. But after the title in chapter 1. Dear Ephesian Saints.

The faithful in Christ Jesus. Paul launches into a glorious 14 verse mega sentence. Now the translators take pity on us and split it up a bit.

But here Paul pours out the truth of the spiritual blessings that we enjoy in Christ. Then he breaks into prayers of thanksgiving before describing in unforgettable terms.

How we are made alive in Christ. How we are made alive in Christ. How we are made alive in Christ. And made one in Christ. Whatever our background. And he talks of the way that the door to let in the light on the mystery of Christ is opened by Jesus and his finished work.

And when we reach the latter part of chapter 3. It's as if the inspired and inspiring head knowledge as it were. Overflows into an outpouring of heart knowledge.

[12:44] Of heart feeling. We might call it an anthem of praise. A peon of praise. A thanksgiving prayer like no other. Unity in Christ is how the message carries on in chapter 4.

With that wonderful analogy of us being parts of the body of Christ. All true Christian believers. That implies that our lives are transformed by knowing Christ.

Not just once a week words. But constant living. Behaving in a way ourselves and towards each other. That fosters that very unity.

And shows how our hearts are changed as we imitate God himself. Chapter 5 verse 1. And we have to be very careful how we live in our relationships.

Paul recognises that living differently from the world is a battle. Because the devil hates it when we show evidence of the love of Christ in our lives.

[13:55] So in the war in which we are engaged. With Christ as our captain. We've got a full suit of spiritual armour to wear.

Just as we read. Each bit rich in significance and importance. And then as the letter ends. On a truly personal note. Paul craves the Ephesians prayers for himself.

In his chains in Rome. And he rubber stamps Tychicus as the herald. The bearer of the letter. So that the Ephesians may know how he is. And so that they might be encouraged in their faith.

And then he signs off with a threefold prayer of intercession. He prays for peace. To the brothers and sisters.

So peace then love. That is agape love. Self giving love. But not just love. Rather love with faith.

[14:59] And not just peace and love with faith. But these gifts are from Father and Son. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And then the third part of the intercession.

Peace. Love with faith. And finally grace. Peace. And this prayer is for all. Who love our Lord Jesus Christ. With love.

Incorruptible. I don't know about you. But the depth of the riches here are such. That I find it hard to get words. To express much of what I'm thinking.

But what we have here is Paul. Clearly very emotionally attached. To the members of this church. And he would give them anything he had. To benefit them.

Materially and spiritually. So a question or two. Can the Ephesians give themselves peace? No. They are startlingly bright lights.

[16:02] In the darkness of pagan Ephesus. But this witness confers conflict. And persecution. And pain. Not peace as we might understand it.

Well then. Can Paul give them peace? No. Assuredly he would have. If he could have. But he couldn't. Yet he prays for their peace.

Peace that could only come. From God himself. The giver of peace. You see peace is a gift. And God himself is the giver.

Peace. But peace here is not the absence of fighting. Of war. Of conflict. And nor is it the absence of noise.

And hubbub as in quiet. The Greek word translated peace here. Irene. Is the equivalent of the Hebrew word shalom. And though translated peace.

[17:01] Peace for assuredly peace of heart. Is spiritual peace. It's much more than that. It's a word that implies. Wholeness. Completeness. The face of God shining on you.

In fatherly approval. This is supernatural peace. Peace that the world cannot confer. Fear. And peace that the world cannot take away.

Paul elsewhere in Philippians 4. Talks of the peace of God. Which transcends all understanding. Guarding or garrisoning. The Philippian believers hearts and minds.

In Christ Jesus. So Paul's concluding remarks to the Ephesians. In this letter. Are not a throw away. Sincerely yours.

Or all the best remark. This is a weighty prayer. Crystallizing a heartfelt wish. That these friends would know.

[18:04] Supernatural wholeness. In their inner beings. As God the father. Shines his face on them. And then he prays. That they would know this amazing love.

This agape love. This self-giving love. This love which is amalgamated with faith. And guess what? This cannot come from themselves.

From their own initiative either. And it's certainly not something Paul can confer on them. Much as he might like to be able to do precisely that. It comes rather from the Trinity.

From God the father. The Lord Jesus Christ. Through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Actually the book of Ephesians records several prayers.

That Paul offered up continually to God. On behalf of the Ephesians. On behalf of the Ephesians. And you know what a privilege it is. When others pray for you.

[19:09] And quite often when they do. We don't even know about it. Maybe if we are praying to God. Our father who is in heaven.

For people in their need. We should let them know. That we are doing this. For their encouragement. That they are being upheld. Before the throne of grace.

Sometimes we can't let people know. Because we are praying for the needs of folk. We don't know personally. Like mission workers. Whose names we know. And whose needs we know.

Yet that intercession. Is just as important. And powerful. As for those we do know personally. But the challenge. Is whether we are interceding for others.

Even a little. Or maybe not at all. Paul's first big prayer for the Ephesians. Is recorded in chapter 1 verse 16.

[20:09] He says. For this reason. Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus. And your love towards all the saints. That's Christ's body on earth.

But pardon me. That's love and faith again. Mentioned in the same breath. I do not cease. He says. To give thanks for you. Remembering you in my prayers. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father of glory. May give you the spirit of wisdom. And of revelation. In the knowledge of him. Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

That you may know. Know what is the hope to which he has called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

And what is the immeasurable greatness. Of his power towards us. Who believe. According to the working of his great might. That he worked in Christ.

[21:07] When he raised him from the dead. And seated him. At his right hand. In the heavenly places. Far above all rule and authority. And power and dominion.

And above every name that is named. Not only in this age. But also in the one to come. You can just envisage Paul a bit breathless. As he comes to the end.

Of that next huge multi-clawed sentence. But the basic prayer. As one of the translations has put it. Is that the Ephesians may know God better. As Christ has revealed him. That they may know heart revelation.

Of the very mystery of Christ. Coming to die for. Pay the price for. Rise again for his loved ones.

[22:06] Knowing hope. Knowing the rich inheritance. That awaits us. Earned by our brother. Born for adversity. And knowing the unknowable.

Measuring the unmeasurable. Understanding that the very same power. That raised Jesus from the dead. Is the power that transforms us.

And raises us from spiritual death. And will one day literally. Raise and resurrect us bodily. Jesus himself in the upper room.

John 17 verse 3 said. Now. Now. This is eternal life. That they know you.

The only true God. And Jesus Christ. Whom you have sent. I find it so beautiful. Just how often Paul.

[23:05] Finds himself on his knees. For his Ephesian family. And he realizes. In chapter 3 verse 13. That they are anxious about him. In his captivity in Rome.

Chained for two years. Physically chained to a guard. So he prays that they would not lose heart. But instead be strengthened. With power. Through God's spirit.

In their inner beings. So that Christ might dwell in their hearts. Through faith. And that takes us back. To the upper room again. John 14 verse 23.

Where Jesus is encouraging us. That if anyone. Anyone loves him. He will obey. She will obey. His teaching. And. Says Jesus. My father. Will love him or her. And he and I. Will love that person. [24 : 06] And we will come. To him or her. And make our home. With him. So this so matters. We are here this evening.

Whatever discouragements. Trials. Pains. May be around us. And be our worldly experience. We are here. Indwelt. By God.

Himself. Father. Father. Son. And spirit. And the prayer of none other than the apostle Paul himself. Is that. Christ. May dwell. In your hearts.

Through faith. That you being rooted. And grounded in love. May have strength. To comprehend. To know. With all the saints.

What is the breadth. And length. And height. And depth. And to know the love of Christ. That surpasses knowledge. That's what it says. To know. The love.

[25 : 01] That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled with all the fullness of God. So. Does Paul want us to comprehend the incomprehensible?

Does he want us to measure the immeasurable? Does he want us to define the indefinable? I think what he wants us to do.

Is to try. To do. Precisely that. And as we. Open our hearts. To drink in God's word.

And as we dwell on who God is. Is. Well. We. Begin. To understand. That.

God. Is. Love. Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. And because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

[26 : 04] And continues to do for us. At the Father's right hand. Interceding for us. We begin. To get filled. With all the fullness of God. Who has made his home in our hearts.

This always was the state of beautiful communion. Which God intended we should have with him. And that we lost through pride and wrong choice in Eden.

And a seemingly unbreakable barrier erected between us and our creator. Because of sin. But that barrier is now torn in two.

From top to bottom. From heaven to earth. By the death. Of God's sinless son. You see when in verse 23 of chapter 6.

It says peace and love with faith. From God the Father. And the Lord Jesus Christ. It really means it. This is the character of our God.

[27 : 08] The God from whom all blessings flow. And truly this demands our praise. Our adoration and our worship. You see the peace comes from God.

The love comes from God. And the faith comes from God. Chapter 2 says so clearly that by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing.

It is the gift of God. Not a result of works. So that no one may boast. So that is a gift.

Salvation. Through faith. By grace. Is a gift. Faith is a gift from God. And as I quoted earlier from Philippians.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding. There is something else we can't rationalize. But we can experience. We will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[28 : 07] So that is a gift too. Peace. Shalom. Is also God's gift. And then we have 1 John 4 7 to 10. Beloved. Let us love one another.

For love is of God. And everyone who loves is born of God. And knows God. He who does not love does not know God. For God is love.

In this the love of God was manifested toward us. That God has sent his only begotten son into the world. That we might live through him.

In this is love. Not that we loved God. But that he loved us. And sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

So love is a gift too. Faith, peace and love are all God's gift to us. How can this be? It's of grace. Grace is where we receive what we do not deserve.

[29 : 09] Mercy is where we do not receive what we do deserve. I've talked about grace here before. The acronym God's riches at Christ's expense.

I sometimes smile a little when I use that grace acronym. Because it's been used as an acronym in other places. And even in cardiology. Because there grace stands for the global registry of adverse cardiac events.

I'm sure you're better off for knowing that. And it provides a scoring system to try to predict how serious chest pain might prove to be.

If you've got a low score of one or two, the situations are relatively stable and benign one. But if on the other hand your score is ten, then there might not be prudence in starting a very long book. But grace, God's grace does not operate on a scoring system. It is bounteous, copious, overflowing, hyperabounding, poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 25] There are no half measures in our salvation. This is a binary system. Yes or no. Saved or not. If you have received those gifts of God's grace.

Which are peace, love and faith. Then these are not stinting. But they reflect John 10.10 where Jesus tells us in the joy of this. He says, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Or have life to the full. So I suppose it's no surprise that these great Greek words of Irene, peace, agape, self-giving, love, epistis, faith, charis, grace, have provided us with a large range of four names which we use for our own children.

Still in popular use. There are several irenes and a charis in our own church. Not to mention grace. In some circles, agape is a popular girl's name too.

I've got a cousin's daughter called Faith. There's an inherent desirability in these beautiful concepts. In the conclusion to Paul's letter, what we have is a wonderfully paradoxical picture.

[31 : 48] You see, we have the rather diminutive Paul, that dynamo of the faith. We understand though he was quite a short man. There he is, chained to another human being for two whole years on house arrest in Rome.

In a dreadful state. We might say no convention of human rights anywhere on the horizon even. And again and again in this letter, he is on his knees praying.

And he's praying wonderful, glorious prayers. Which conclude with this final prayerful salvo at the end of chapter 6. Where he craves God's blessing on his friends and fellow believers.

And by extension on you and me here tonight. That we would experience peace and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

All that and grace too. The one provisos is that we love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

[33 : 00] Oh, so these are the questions we have to answer tonight. Do we love our Lord Jesus Christ? And is that love incorruptible?

Do we get vexed when Jesus asks us again and again whether we love him? Just as he asked Peter on the shores of Galilee after his denials.

In the high priest's courtyard in Jerusalem. Are we purer than Peter? Or do we deny when persecution and conflict confronts us?

Do we not speak up when we should? Do we find it easy to be faithful when we don't have to face up to persecution? How would we fare in the fires of affliction in those countries where Christians are in danger of their lives?

For meeting for worship and for taking the name of Jesus on their lips. How would we fare then? Would our love grow very cold very quickly?

[34 : 17] We simply do not know how we might respond. Might our love be corruptible?

Might mine? Now, I have got wonderful news for you tonight, my friends. The love, the incorruptible love that Paul is talking about here does not depend on how we feel.

He is not talking about a human emotion here that waxes or wanes according to what we have eaten or drunk or the weather or whether a sporting result has been to our liking or not.

That is worldly trivia. The incorruptible love is the love of Christ Jesus himself, which is magnificent and full and does not change with external influences.

This love is shed abroad in our hearts. We love him because he first loved us. But let me read you these few verses from the start of Romans chapter 5.

[35 : 44] It says there, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

There is a wonderful illustration of all of this from the natural world, the world God has created.
[36 : 55] I was pondering this a few months back. Of all places, sitting in a courtesy car in the car park beside Troon Beach as I waited for my own car to be serviced.

I had remembered, it had come to me that Jesus was the light of the world. Yet in Matthew 5, we are told that as his followers, we are the light of the world.

And it occurred to me that we reflect him. And then a memory stirred from my days of studying physics at school.

And I remembered a phenomenon that I was able to Google called, and don't lose heart with me here, the absorption coefficient of light. So hang in there.

It does get simpler. What that means is that whenever light falls on any surface, three things happen in the natural world.

[38 : 05] God's world. Some light is reflected. That's why I can see you. Light bounces off you to me.

So some light is reflected. Some is absorbed by whatever it catches. And some light is transmitted. That is what the physicists tell us.

My thought was that as Jesus is my light, as God's face shines on me and us, that I reflect some of that to the world.

But also back to the source of that light, to my Heavenly Father. Some of that energy I absorb into the core of who I am.

And having done that, some I transmit on to others. You see, I think, this is what the incorruptible love of Christ shed abroad, shining down on us.

[39 : 20] His family, God's adopted family, his born again family. See, I think some of that love we reflect back to him. But some we reflect on to others as the lights of the world that Jesus has told us we are.

Some of it we absorb into our very souls, forming in us the image of Christ.

And that will be perfected in due course as we are conformed to his likeness. And that day comes when we shall see him as he is.

But some of that love we transmit because of what we have become as Christ is in us, as the hope of glory.

So, we have that incorruptible love. Because it isn't ours in the first place. It comes from the very source.

[40 : 33] So, may we be those witnesses our Lord wants us to be to his glory. As his grace is with us. All of us who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

With love incorruptible. As I close, I'd like to remind you of one of the most memorable passages of scripture.

Read by Christian and non-Christian believer and non-believer alike. And that's 1 Corinthians 13. And I'd like you, as I read this through in conclusion.

I'm going to put, you'll forgive me if I'm going to put the word incorruptible before love. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not incorruptible love.

I'm a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge. And if I've got all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not incorruptible love.

[41 : 46] I'm nothing. If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned. But have not incorruptible love. I gain nothing. Incorruptible love is patient and kind.

Incorruptible love does not envy or boast. It's not arrogant or rude. It doesn't insist in its own way. It's not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Incorruptible love bears all things. Believes all things. Hopes all things. Endures all things.

Incorruptible love never ends.

As for prophecies, well they will pass away. In tongues they'll cease. As for knowledge it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly.

[42 : 52] But then face to face. Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully. Even as I have been fully known.

And so now, faith, hope and incorruptible love abide. These three. But the greatest of these is love incorruptible.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.