

A Fitting Conclusion

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[0 : 00] Please send your Bible to the book of Ephesians.!

Please follow along as I read, and I'm reading from the English Standard Version. 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.

Please pray with me. Father, we bow our hearts in this moment as we look to your word. Lord, we do so as an indication of our neediness, that we need your help as your word is proclaimed.

[2 : 03] Lord, I need your help to proclaim your word, and we all need your help to hear your word. Lord, we pray and ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. It would not surprise me this morning if there are some who are wondering about what benefit we can possibly gain from these brief and final words of greeting that we find at the end of this letter.

And if you're wondering that, you're really not alone. For many believers, beyond just reading these words, they really don't consider them.

And as a result, what we find is that in the New Testament letters, the opening greetings and the final greetings of letters are perhaps among the most neglected parts of Scripture.

We read past them quickly without much thought. But I think what will help us to change that is to remember that the opening greetings and the final greetings are as much God's word, his inspired word, as the rest of it.

[3 : 50] It is not as if holy men upon whom God moved to write these letters to the churches, that they be passed on to us, that they had no inspiration when they were writing the opening greetings or the final greetings.

They only had inspiration in the middle. No, all of it is God's inspired word. And brothers and sisters, I say this to you this morning with deep conviction, that if we begin with that conviction, if we begin with that view of God's word, there is so much that we are able to draw from these opening greetings and final greetings that we find in the New Testament letters.

If we're going to profit from it, we have to start at that point. This is God's holy word. This is his inspired word. Lord, speak to me as I read these greetings.

And that's my prayer for us this morning, that God will speak to us as we consider these words of final greetings. And as we consider them this morning, here is what I want us to see.

I want us to see that in his final greetings, Paul reminds us of the priority of our shared mission and our shared faith.

[5 : 19] These are not empty, idle words of the end. No, Paul uses these final greetings as a reminder of the priority of our shared mission and our shared faith.

Now, as I foreshadowed during the week, the sermon is not going to be long. And I smile because it ended up being longer than I thought it would be, but it's still going to be a short sermon.

And then we are going to conclude the gathering and we'll have a time of questions and answers. For those who are able to stay for that and you have questions.

And I'll try to provide answers. So first, let's consider how Paul's final greetings remind us, number one, of the priority of our shared mission.

We see Paul placing priority on the mission which he shared with the Ephesian church in verses 21 to 22. And so despite the fact that Paul had just written to them this authoritative letter about the

great salvation they had received and how they were supposed to be living as a result of it, here are these final words to them.

[6 : 50] The Apostle Paul personally greets them. And he sees his ministry as one that is shared with them. That's what he communicates in these two verses.

He wants them to know how he is doing and what he is doing. And it's clearly for more than just information. And he's certainly doing more than the letter that he just wrote to them, that he's commending to them.

Paul wanted them to know what was happening with him and his fellow workers and what they were doing. And again, not just for information.

No doubt this was for awareness, for support in prayer, for support otherwise. And he's doing this because he recognizes that he is not in some silo across many, many miles away from them, writing them a letter and existing in a vacuum.

No, Paul recognizes that the mission of the church is a shared mission. The mission of the church is a shared mission between church leaders and church members.

[8 : 14] And that shared mission is the Great Commission. It is the work of the church to preach the gospel and to make disciples.

That is the Great Commission. And it's not just something that church leaders are called to do. It is something that the church together is called to do.

It is a mission that they share together. All of God's people are called together in this Great Commission in different ways and to different degrees.

And the fact that the Apostle Paul wanted the Ephesians to be aware of how he was doing and what he was doing is a reminder that the Great Commission is a shared mission.

And so Paul sends Tychicus to the Ephesian church not only to deliver the letter but also to update the Ephesians on how he and his team were, how they were personally.

[9 : 20] He wanted them to know how he was doing personally. But he also wanted them to be aware of what they were doing. And he also wanted Tychicus to encourage them.

He was confident that as Tychicus went to them and brought this letter to them and updated them that it would encourage their hearts. He said, I'm sending him that he would encourage your hearts. Encourage your hearts in what God is doing beyond just where you are and that you have a part to play in this.

In these two verses, we see the Apostle Paul reminds us that there is or there should be no disconnect between church leaders and church members.

Why? Because they share in the same mission. They share in the Great Commission together. But sadly, too often there is disconnect.

[10 : 30] Some church leaders intentionally distance themselves from church members. And in some cases, some members who attend some churches don't know their leaders any better than people who don't attend.

and what they may read in the public. That is how aloof and that is how insulated and isolated some church leaders intentionally live their lives.

And so there are nothing more than talking heads in the pulpit who are only known from a distance. There's no awareness about their lives, how they are and what they are doing.

And then on the other side of the equation, though, there are some church members who intentionally distance themselves, not just from church leaders, but also from other church members.

And so they have no way of knowing what others are doing or how others are doing because they're not engaged, they're not a part, they're not participating in the work and the mission that God has given to that local church together.

[11 : 47] Church leaders don't know them, they don't know how they're doing, what they're doing. But as His people, God has joined us together in the mission of the Great Commission through a local church and He calls us to be known by one another and He calls us to know one another.

The Apostle Paul models that. In humility, he models that to this church. And he sends Tich because he says, tell them how I'm doing and tell them what we are doing.

Check on them and try to encourage their hearts. And brothers and sisters, it is easy to read over these verses, it is easy to miss the significance of this.

I pray that we don't. The significance of this is a reminder that our mission as a church is a shared mission, it is the Great Commission, the preaching of the gospel and the making of disciples and we are to all be a part of it.

You know, those days they didn't have live stream. So when Tychicus showed up with the letter and when Tychicus came to update the church, there was no way to know unless you were there.

[13:15] we all have a part to play. We all have a role to play and that is why God in His wisdom gives us these analogies, He gives us these descriptions of what the church is like and one of them is a body.

And I think all of us know that we want our whole body. We don't want any part of our body out of whack. You know, I have, it's quite amazing, I have a finger, this, I have ten fingers, but I have a thumb, my right thumb, that for some reason the nail on it just keeps breaking.

Just this one, it breaks and it always breaks down near to the flesh. And so I have to kind of wait for it to grow up to get, so that I don't bleed when I break it, but meanwhile it's snaggy into all kinds of things and it's very uncomfortable.

Just a nail, just a fingernail that's a part of my body can bring that kind of discomfort and distraction and slow down of so many things they want to do.

And brothers and sisters, whatever role we play, whatever part we are, we are in a mission together, a shared mission, and we are all important. And we should banish from our hearts the lie, the deception that the enemy would try to bring that it doesn't matter what I do.

[14:53] I can attend, I cannot attend, I can participate or not participate, it really would not matter. It does matter, brothers and sisters. Whatever role we are given, we have to fulfill that.

And when we don't, it is to that degree that the body suffers. And I remind you that I cannot do this all by myself.

As a leader, I need just so many others to come alongside and to help and to share. We have a shared mission together and the Apostle Paul, as he concludes this letter, he gives us a wonderful example of how this mission is shared.

That he didn't just plop a letter over to the Ephesians, but he opened his life to them, invited them into that because they had a shared mission together.

He wanted them to know what he was doing, wanted them to know how he was doing, and so that they would be able to share in that through prayer, through support, and whatever other means was necessary.

[16:10] Well, not only do these words of Paul remind us of the priority of our shared mission, they also remind us of the priority of our shared faith. Paul reminded the Ephesians of their shared faith in verses 23 to 24.

24. Now, before we look at the verses, I think it would be helpful to appreciate something that is going on in these two verses that we would not naturally be aware of in the time that we live.

In the time that Paul lived, in letter writing, there was a standard way that they would end letters. you know, we write letters today, there's a standard way that we tend to write letters.

We say dear, and we end with sincerely, or yours truly, or those kinds of things. But in Paul's day, when they wrote letters, it was customary at the end of the letter to express some kind of a wish or a desire for the recipient of the letter.

Not at the front, at the end. And the wish was all over the place. A lot of it would have been secular. Typically, those are the letters that were written.

[17:33] And so people would just wish words of well-being for the recipients of the letter. It could be that they would be prosperous, that they would have good health, or good fortune, or whatever.

And that's what the Apostle Paul is essentially doing in these two verses. But he doesn't wish for the typical things that letter writers of his day would have wished for.

He didn't wish for good health, or for prosperity, or for good fortune. Instead, what we see in verses 23 and 24 is that of all the things that Paul could have wished for, he focuses on the faith of God's people, the faith that they shared together.

people, and actually what we see in verses 23 and 24 is that Paul does more than express a wish for the Ephesians. What he does is he essentially is praying for them.

He expresses a prayer for them. And so what Paul does is he Christianizes, if you want to use that word, he Christianizes formal, typical way the letters would be ended as he wrote to the Ephesians.

[19 : 01] He took what was, you may call, secular, and he made it in a sense sacred. His prayer is centered on their shared faith that has come to them through the gospel.

Look again at what he writes in verses 23 to 24. 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 with love incorruptible. This is his prayer for the whole church.

And for those of you who have an English standard version, notice that there's a footnote number six on the word brothers. And the footnote states that it refers to brothers and sisters.

So when we read that, it's referring to brothers and sisters. So this is a blessing on the whole church. And to grasp what Paul is saying, notice four key words verses 23 and 24.

[20 : 22] They are peace, love, faith, and grace. Those are four key words that the Apostle Paul uses in these final greetings.

Christians. And they are words of our shared faith. They are words that belong to the people of God. And throughout the New Testament letters, you will see these words repeated again and again and again.

And normally when you see them repeated, you would see them as twins. You will see them together. So you would see, for example, grace and peace. peace. And you will see love and faith. And they're like twins, always together in that way. And the reason they're together in that way is because you can't have grace without peace because the only way that a person can know God's peace is to first know God's grace.

No grace, no peace. And then you can't have love without faith because the way that you can have love, God's love, in your heart, the only way you'll have that is if you have received God's gift of faith into your heart.

[21 : 51] So love doesn't exist in a vacuum. The love of God being in our heart, comes because first, the gift of faith came into our hearts by an act of God and salvation.

And this is what Paul is wishing. This is what he's praying for the Ephesians. He is praying for them. That it's God's new community. They would be marked by grace and peace.

They would be marked by love and faith that come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what he is expressing in these words of greeting.

And in so doing, what he's doing is he is reminding them that we have a shared faith together. You have a shared faith together. He's reminding us of that. Not just the Ephesians. He's reminding us of this priority of our shared faith.

again, of all the things that he could wish for, he could express for them, he could pray for, this is what he highlights. That these things would mark them, that these things would be evident among them.

[23 : 11] That God's people would be marked by grace and peace and by love and faith that come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so properly understood, whenever these are seen upon us, whenever grace and peace is seen in our midst, love and faith, seen in our midst, seen in our lives, if it draws anyone's attention, ultimately we point them to the source of it, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

They don't exist among us. They don't exist in our shared faith in a vacuum and for no reason they exist to point back to the source and to the giver of them, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what Paul is expressing for them. Now it's helpful to notice that Paul ends his letter in a very similar way to how he begins his letter.

So the opening verse of, or verse 2 of chapter 1, this is what Paul said, and we considered this when we began the letter. He greets them with these opening words, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 49] But in verses 23 and 24, he changes the order. It's not grace and peace, but he changes the order and it is peace and grace.

He first commits the peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to them and then God's grace. And I think the order is a reminder to us of the effect of the grace of God in our lives. It's a reminder that the grace of God in our lives has given us peace. It's given us peace with God. We're no longer objects of his wrath. We're no longer separated from him and hostile towards him. But also it gives us the peace of God. It gives us a peace that is beyond understanding. A peace that the world didn't give and a peace that the world cannot take away.

A peace that we can have in the midst of storms. In the midst of difficulties and trials. That peace marks our lives in our shared faith because grace has come to us.

[26 : 04] God's grace has come to us and therefore we can know God's peace. And notice as well in verse 24 how Paul tactfully concludes the letter touching upon the grace of God.

He says grace is this prayer grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. We sang wonderful songs this morning that remind us of this truth. God has put a love in our hearts for the Lord Jesus Christ that is genuine.

Now Paul talks about love incorruptible. He's talking about genuine love. He's talking about real love. He's talking about a love that isn't going to go away and fade. And he says the love that's in your heart.

He says grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with this genuine love. This genuine love that comes from God. We love him.

[27 : 23] Why? Because he first loved us. And it's true love. It's genuine love. Is it perfect love? No. Do we love the Lord perfectly? No. But it's genuine.

It's real. And Paul prays that God's grace will be upon all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible with genuine love.

And brothers that's our shared faith. That's our shared faith. Our shared faith is that God has come to us in mercy and grace and saved us and put his love in our hearts that we love the Lord Jesus in a genuine and in a real way in the midst of all of our weaknesses and all of our failings.

There is this incorruptible, there is this love that will last to the end. And Paul brings us to the fore, brings us before their eyes as he closes this letter.

this is his priority for them. And it needs to be the priority for us, brothers and sisters. This that we have is more precious than any possession that we have in this life.

[28 : 42] This is enduring. This will endure to the age to come. Nothing else that we have in this life will endure in that way.

And so Paul, in concluding this letter, he reminds them, this is your shared faith. Grace and peace, love and faith.

And may the grace of God rest upon, be with all those who love the Lord Jesus with that genuine love that only comes from God. And that's how he concludes the letter, reminding them, and indeed reminding us, that we have a shared mission together.

The gospel has come to us, and now we lock arms together to carry that gospel to others. And in our being together, we're reminded that what is precious, what keeps us together, what we hold in common, is we have this shared faith.

Of all that we've received from God, grace and peace, love and faith, and the promise that all those who love the Lord Jesus with love incorruptible will have the grace of God upon their lives in an unbroken way from now and throughout all eternity.

[30 : 27] This has been a wonderful sermon series that we have walked through in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And as we conclude it this morning, I want to remind us again of what this message of Ephesians really is.

I want to remind us. We heard it at the beginning and throughout the series, but I want to remind us. And what I want to do is I want to do what I did when we started this sermon series on the 6th of February, the very first sermon.

Two quotes I shared from John Stott, and I believe it'll be fitting for me to share them again this morning. The first thing he wrote is this. One of our chief evangelical blind spots has been to overlook the central importance of the church.

We tend to proclaim individual salvation without moving on to the saved community. We emphasize that Christ died for us to redeem us from our iniquity, rather than to purify for himself a people of his own.

We think of ourselves more as Christians than as churchmen, and our message is more good news of a new life than of a new society.

[31 : 57] As we conclude this letter of Ephesians, I want us to be reminded that the point of the whole letter is you are the new people of God. You're the community of God.

You're the new society of God. And that's why we need to think in terms of shared faith and shared mission. And then finally, this last quote from John Stott, which I pray will be the lasting effect of this series in our hearts.

He writes, nobody can emerge from a careful reading of Paul's letter to the Ephesians with a privatized gospel. For Ephesians is the gospel of the church.

My prayer for us is that wherever we were regarding our view of the church when we began this sermon series, I pray that our view of the church is clearer.

I pray that it is stronger. I pray that it will mark how we relate to one another, that we don't live in isolation.

[33 : 09] This is not a private faith. It's not just me and Jesus. It's us and Jesus. It's us together in our shared mission. It is us together in this wonderful faith that God has given to us.

This precious enduring faith that cannot be corrupted, that cannot be distorted, that cannot be taken away from us.

We belong to the Lord and we will always belong to the Lord and we will always, as a result, belong together. And isn't that a wonderful truth to hold on to, that from now until eternity, yeah, there may be breaks, you know, death may separate us, moving may separate us, but one day we will all be united together with the God of our salvation.

And we will be with him for all eternity. And that's because he always intended not just to save individual people, but to have a people of his own possession.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word this morning. We thank you, Lord, that you have saved us and brought us into a family of brothers and sisters, with you being our father.

[34 : 40] And Lord, I pray that as a result of this sermon series, we as a church have grown and have been strengthened in our view of the church and our awareness that we are one people, your new community.

We have a shared mission and we have a shared faith. Lord, only you can cause the effect of this sermon series to be enduring and so that we ask that you would do that.

Work it in all of our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Let's stand for our closing song.