

Ephesians
Benediction!
Ephesians 6:21-24
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Well, I have to tell you I feel today like I'm saying goodbye to an old friend as we come to the end of our study in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This week I looked up the date, the exact date, that we started studying Ephesians. And it's hard for me to believe but we actually began on June 24th, 2007. There were some other series in the middle of all of that. Just out of curiosity, how many of you started attending our church during our study of Ephesians? You weren't here when we started in June of 2007. Let me see your hands. Wow. I thought that would be true so here's what I'm going to do. We're going to start over. No, I'm just kidding.

What I want to do today is finish chapter 6 and as I mentioned I'm going to be away next Sunday but when I return after Shepherd's Conference I want to fly over this letter. I want in one message for us to get an aerial view of all that we've learned over the last four years. But today what I want us to do is to look at the last four verses. Paul's personal conclusion to this wonderful letter. Let me read it for you. Ephesians chapter 6 beginning in verse 21,

But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

These four verses are Paul's great benediction to this really what was a circular letter intended first for the church in Ephesus and then for the surrounding churches in the entire region. And this conclusion is a kind of model of Paul's heart and concern for others. We can see that. We can see his heart and concern for these dear people, but Paul also shows us something more in these concluding verses. He really shows us Christ's own heart for us. You know it's easy to read this

conclusion and, frankly, be impressed with Paul. With his love for Tychicus, with his deep concern for the Ephesians rather than his own very trying and difficult circumstances. And it's very easy for us to make Paul the hero of the story. But we should never do that. Paul wouldn't want us to do that. Because Ephesians chapter 6 verses 21-24 is not about Paul. Ephesians is not about Paul. The New Testament is not about Paul. I was reminded of that this week. I was proofing a typeset copy of an article that I've written for the Master's Seminary Journal. And in that article, at some point maybe we'll make it available to you not because it's a great article but because it's about a great subject, but in that article, I make this point that when we come to the Word of God, we should never make ourselves and our needs the ultimate point. Yes, the Bible does meet our needs. The Bible does feed our souls. But that's not the ultimate point. Moreover, we shouldn't even make the great characters of the Bible the main point. You see the Bible is intentionally "theocentric" that is, God-centered. The biblical characters are merely the supporting cast. And when we study the Bible, when we teach the Bible, we must never shine the brightest spotlight on the supporting actors or the walk-ons. Instead, the spotlight must always be reserved for the main character and for His story. We must always remember that the Bible is in the end, God's self-revelation.

Several months ago, now we looked at the great theme of the Bible. What is the Bible about? The answer to that question is that the one true God is redeeming a people by His Son for His Son to His own glory. The one true God is redeeming a people by His Son, for His Son to His own glory. That's what the Bible is about. It's not about Abraham, it's not about Joseph, it's not about David, it's not about Samuel, it's not about Paul. So, when we read the Bible, we have to keep that in mind. Even when we read Paul's benediction to this great letter. It is not about Paul. The only reason what Paul says matters is because of what God is doing through Paul. Look back at the very first verse of this letter. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 1, "Paul," and here's why he matters, here's why you should read a 2000-year-old letter and why we should study it for four years, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Paul says, I was hand-picked to be a representative of Jesus Christ. I am one who is sent by Him identified as an apostle by the will of God. And so, what I say isn't just me; it is God speaking through me. It is the One Who has sent me, Jesus Christ, speaking through me. So, the truths and the heart that are set forth in this great letter they do reflect the heart of Paul. But more importantly this letter reflects the heart of Jesus Christ the One Who sent Paul. So, when you read even this benediction realize that what you see in the heart of the

apostle Paul is simply a high-definition reflection of the heart of Christ for us. You want to know how Christ thinks about you as an individual, about us as a church? You see it reflected in the heart of the apostle Paul even in the great benediction of this letter. So, when we see Paul's heart we should look beyond Paul, and we should see Christ.

So then, let's ask the question. When we look at these last four verses what do we learn ultimately not about Paul but about our Lord by looking at this reflection of Him in the heart of the apostle He chose? There really are two very simple lessons in this great benediction. Two simple lessons about Christ and His concern for us reflected in the heart of the apostle. The first lesson we could put this way: If it's a care to us, it's a concern to Him. If it's a care to us, it's a concern to Him. Probably beginning with verse 21, Paul takes the pen from his amanuensis, the one to whom he's been dictating this letter and he begins to write on the parchment with his own hand. This was his normal practice. Look back in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 as he ends his first letter to the Corinthians. First Corinthians 16:21 he writes, "The greeting is in my own hand—Paul. If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen." Paul takes the pen from the one to whom he's dictating, and he writes the conclusion. Same thing happens in Galatians chapter 6. Galatians chapter 6 verse 11, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." In the sister epistle to Ephesians, Colossians chapter 4 verse 18, you see this same trend. He ends, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you." And then in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 17, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." In other words, Paul essentially dictated the letter and then he wrote the last few lines as his signature as it were. This is how I write. This is how you can be sure the letter is from me.

So, the same thing undoubtedly is happening in Ephesians as Paul says this is what I do in all my letters. I write the very end of the letter with my own handwriting as it were, my signature to add the weight of my own call and apostleship to what has been written. Paul, on his third missionary journey, had stayed in Ephesus for almost three full years. And then he left and about 6 full years later he wrote them this letter. And as his custom was he probably dictated this letter, most of it, and when he came to the final words probably beginning in verse 21, he took the pen from his

amanuensis and he wrote and notice what he wrote in verse 21 and 22, “But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.” By the way, if you look over at Colossians chapter 4 verses 7 through 9, you can read it on your own, it’s almost identical except he mentions Onesimus (Onesimus) as well. On the surface, Paul is simply explaining why he’s sending Tychicus to hand deliver this letter. And in so doing he expresses his concern for these people.

The question is who is Tychicus? You say does it matter? Oh, it matters. It matters because in him many of us can find ourselves. Who is this man, Tychicus? He’s mentioned only here and three other times. Go back to Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20 and verse 4, we learn a good bit about him. Paul is in Macedonia and Greece, and it tells us in verse 4 that he was accompanied by several who traveled with him. And notice how the verse ends with Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. So here we learn that Tychicus was from Asia. Trophimus is later said to be from Ephesus so it’s possible that Tychicus was from Ephesus as well. If not from Ephesus, probably from Colossae, one of the two sister cities there close together in Asia Minor. He was probably converted under Paul’s ministry and at the end of the third missionary journey, here he is with Paul in Greece and in Troas and then he actually travels with Paul to Jerusalem. He was with Paul in Jerusalem when Paul was arrested. He stayed with Paul probably for most of the next four years. The two years in Caesarea where he was kept there, you remember, we saw a couple of weeks ago, by those Roman officials that didn’t want to help out, that wanted a bribe and then the trip to Rome and two years according to the end of Acts 28, two years in his own rented quarters waiting for his case to be heard by Nero. Four years. During those four years, it’s likely that Tychicus was with him possibly as his secretary and his amanuensis. After Paul dictates this letter to the church in Ephesus, he sends Tychicus, that’s what he’s saying here, I’m going to send him, and he takes both the letters to the church in Ephesus and the church in Colossae. Later Paul would send him probably to the island of Crete to relieve Titus, Paul’s young son in the faith, so Titus could come and visit Paul. Look at Titus chapter 3, Titus chapter 3 and verse 12, “When I send Artemus or Tychicus to you,” so he hasn’t decided. It will be one of those men, “make every effort [Titus] to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.” So, he sends Tychicus to relieve Titus so Titus can come see him. We know that whether he ended up going to Crete or not, Tychicus

remained loyal to the end because as Paul writes his very last letter in the New Testament, 2 Timothy, the letter he writes shortly before he's executed, Tychicus has been with Paul in Rome and Paul sends Tychicus back to Ephesus to relieve Timothy who's now serving there so Timothy can come to Rome and see his dear friend and mentor before he's killed. Look over in 2 Timothy chapter 4, 2 Timothy 4 and verse 12, "But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, [Timothy] bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments." So, Paul had Tychicus with him in his second Roman imprisonment shortly before his death. He sends him to relieve Timothy so that Timothy can come and see him before he dies.

An amazing man. It's possible that he traveled with Paul and spent all four years of Paul's first captivity with him; he's with him in his second captivity. It's possible that he delivered at least five of the New Testament letters of Paul to the various churches: the letter of Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, 2 Timothy and Titus. It's even possible that he delivered another letter called "The Lost Letter to Laodicea" that's mentioned in Colossians chapter 4 verse 16. An amazing man. When you read of all those adventures that Paul went through in 2 Corinthians 12 where he details, you know, shipwrecks and all the things that happened in his life, understand that this man, Tychicus lived much of it with him. So, no wonder when you come to Ephesians chapter 6 verse 21, he says, "Tychicus the brother I love and the faithful minister in the Lord."

You know, there have been thousands of men and women in the history of the church like Tychicus: faithful, not well known. We don't know if he ever preached a sermon, probably but it's not recorded for us. He never wrote anything that's left for us in the New Testament. In the book of Acts, none of his exploits are described by Luke. And yet here's a faithful man supporting Paul, supporting those who were well known and without people like this, the church would never have survived. And here's the encouraging part: I think God inspired Paul to include this man's name four times, so we get just a glimpse of the fact that there are a lot of unsung heroes in the history of the church. But Christ knows. And he's recorded for us here to remind us that Christ knows and Tychicus will someday stand before the Lord and hear "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Paul has probably just taken the parchment and the pen from Tychicus to whom he's been dictating this letter and he writes about him. Remember Paul is chained to a Roman soldier; he's under house arrest in Rome. He's living in his own rented quarters. He made no real mention of his

circumstances in the letter and now he tells them that he is intentionally sending Tychicus along with this letter to deliver it so that they can hear about Paul's circumstances. Why? Because Paul wants and needs their comfort and their support? No. The reason he wants them to know about his circumstances is for them, for their sake. Look at verse 22, "I have sent him to you for this purpose so that he may comfort your hearts." I want you to know what's happening to me because I'm worried about you. You see, Paul knows that the Ephesians are worried and concerned about him. It's been almost four years since he's been arrested in Jerusalem. He was accused at that point of bringing a member of the Ephesian church, Trophimus, into the Jewish only section of the Temple. That's why he was arrested; that's why he spent four years in jail and so he knows these people in Ephesus are deeply concerned and he wants to comfort their hearts. Isn't that just like Paul? To be less concerned about his own circumstances than about how his circumstances may be affecting them? But what I want you to realize is that the only reason Paul was like that was that he was reflecting the moral character of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was simply living out Christlikeness. This is the way Christ is and was. This is the way He was when He was here. He was always concerned about others. Our Lord was exactly like that. He lived out His life always for others. If someone approached Him with a need or concern, what did He do? You ever read anywhere in the gospels where someone came to Christ with a need or a concern and He said, "Nah. Sorry. You know, I've got a lot going on, I'm here on a mission, and you just need to get in line." No. He always poured Himself out for others. If it was a concern to the person who brought it, it was a concern to Christ. Always! And you see His heart ebbing through the heart of the apostle here. You see it reflected as Paul in his own sort of prison cell, his own rented quarters, almost worse than a prison cell. He had to pay for it. He's not concerned about himself. He's concerned about them. I'm sending Tychicus so that you won't worry anymore, so that your heart will be comforted. And in so doing, he reflects the heart of our Lord. If it was a concern to someone who sought our Lord, it was a concern to Christ. It was true then, it's still true today.

Look over at 1 Peter chapter 5. I was reminded of this passage this week as I was preparing for Shepherd's Conference. I'm going to be preaching from this passage. But notice verse 7. Peter says that we are to humble ourselves by "casting all [our] anxiety on Him." The Greek word for casting means to "throw something on someone else or on something else". It's only used here and in one other place in Luke 19 where the disciples "throw" their cloaks on the colt at the triumphal entry. We are to throw on God. By the way, he borrows this image from Psalm 55 verse 22, "Cast

your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you.” We’re to cast, we’re to throw on God, anything that makes us anxious. How do we do that? How do we throw those things on God? We do it in prayer. That’s how we cast our burdens on the Lord, our anxieties on the Lord and notice though the great encouragement to do this. Cast on the Lord your anxieties. Why? Literally the Greek text says, “because to Him it is a care concerning you.” Because to Him it is a care concerning you. It’s translated here in verse 7 “because He cares for you.” As D. Edmond Hiebert writes, “All that creates anxiety for us whether momentous or trivial is a matter of concern to Him.” Think about the things that caused you anxiety this last week. Think about the troubles you’re facing right now in your life. Whether they’re small or whether they’re large. If it is a care to you, it is a concern to Him. Think about that for a moment. Let that settle down into your soul. The God Who created all things Who sustains it all knows you, believer, and if it is a care to you, it is a concern to Him. And we are to cast our cares, our anxieties on Him because it matters. It matters to Him. Paul sent Tychicus for three reasons: he sent him to safely deliver the letter and probably read it aloud to the congregation; he sent him to explain Paul’s circumstances; and the reason he sent him to do that was to comfort their hearts. Ultimately, he’s not concerned about himself. He was concerned about them. And that is a perfect reflection of the heart of our Lord for us. If it is a care to us, it is a concern to Him. That’s the first lesson we can learn in this benediction.

There’s a second lesson in another simple lesson that we can learn about our Lord here and we see again it reflected in Paul’s heart. If it is a need for us, if it’s a spiritual need for us, it’s a necessity to Him. If it’s a spiritual need for us, it’s a necessity to Him. It’s something He must and will address. Look at the last two verses of Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, verse 23, “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.” All first century letters ended with some kind of a wish for those to whom it was written. Usually the wish, and I’ve read a number of them in my studies back when I was translating papyri, you know all the letters were found in trash heaps, we had to read as part of our educational program. There’s something wrong with that. I don’t know. But anyway, it was helpful, and all those letters end with a wish, usually for good health or happiness or for prosperity. But as Paul does with the conventional first century greetings at the beginning of each of his letters, he also does to the closings. He takes the form of his day, and he sanctifies it. He infuses it with a much deeper meaning. Here, rather than wishing

for their health or their happiness, he pronounces a spiritual blessing on them. It's really similar to the priestly blessing of the Old Testament. Turn back to Numbers chapter 6. Numbers 6, the Lord prescribed this, verse 22, Numbers 6, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, [here's what I want you to do, tell Aaron and his sons,] 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace. So they shall invoke My Name on the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.'"

You know when our kids were young Sheila and I started singing to them at bedtime. The first song that we started singing to them every night at bedtime was that truly profound children's song "Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are." I almost hate to admit that to you, but you know at some point we decided what a waste to sing that every night. I mean how long can you wonder what a star is. So, years ago we started singing to our children every night a version of this blessing from Numbers 6 and even as they've grown older, they still tolerate it because this is a great blessing. It is a blessing in both a wish and a prayer. It's spoken not to God but to the people. And you're saying to the people this is what I want for you. This is what I wish for you. But at the same time, you're acknowledging that only God can give this so it's also a prayer: may the Lord do this. That's what Paul's blessing is at the end of Ephesians. It is both a wish and a prayer for them. Of course, in a sense it's Paul's blessing on the people in Ephesus, the people who received this letter. But as he writes this letter, he's acting as Jesus' representative. He's acting as a proxy for Jesus. So, in a very real sense, he's reflecting not only his own heart for these people but the heart of our Lord. Our Lord wants these blessings poured out on His people. You remember the priestly blessing? The priest didn't wake up one day and say, "You know we really ought to bless these people. We want these good things for these people. We need to come up with a priestly blessing." No. God wanted those blessings for His people, and He came to the priest and said, "Here's what I want you to say in blessing the people and when you do it, I'll respond and bless them." It was motivated by God's great heart to do good to His people. And that's what we see here. This blessing, although it comes from Paul, ultimately doesn't come from Paul, it comes from our Lord. It's His heart. Paul makes that clear by the way because look at the source of these blessings verse 23. "From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul is saying, what I wish for you what I pray for you can only come from God. It is a gift of grace from God the Father and

from His Son the Lord Jesus. And of course, the Spirit Who takes those things and works them in us.

But not only is Paul saying that the Father and the Son are the source of these blessings, but He's also saying they are eager for us to have these spiritual resources that we need. Again, it wasn't that the priest originated the blessing. The blessing was prescribed by God so that He could bless His people because that is the heart of God. He is good and generous. And here in Ephesians it's not that Paul is generous, and God isn't. Paul is only saying I want you to experience these things because it's a reflection of Christ's heart for His people.

You know I think sometimes we get this sinful idea that God is reluctant to give us what we need spiritually. That is Satan's lie. Our God is overwhelmingly generous. Romans chapter 8 you remember verse 32? "He Who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him over for us all how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Hey, listen, if God gave you His most precious possession, His own Son, if He gave His Son and His Son's life for you, do you think He's going to be stingy with everything else? You think He's not going to give you what you need to thrive and grow spiritually? Psalm 84 verse 11 says, "The Lord gives grace and glory. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." Listen, if it is a spiritual need for us, it becomes a necessity for our Lord to meet. Look at Matthew chapter 7—we're going to begin in a few months' time studying this passage. But notice Matthew 7 verse 7. The Lord says here's how you ought to think about it, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Now, I understand there are provisos on this and in other places in Scripture. James says sometimes we don't receive because we ask to fulfill our lusts, etc. But don't miss the big point Jesus is making. And that is: God is by nature generous. If you have a spiritual need, ask and God will provide it. Now, sometimes what God knows we need and what we think we need can be different—often are different from one another and God doesn't give us what we think we need but God is generous. He is overwhelmingly generous. Notice verse 9. "What man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, [of bread] will give him a stone?" You're hungry son? Oh, you want a loaf of bread? Here's a rock. "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" The Lord is speaking in hyperbole here, says, listen you're not even good like God and yet you give good gifts to your children because they're your children, you're

concerned about them. Verse 11, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more” underline that “how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” Listen, God is not stingy. God is generous and if it is a true spiritual need in your life, He wants you to have it. Notice that these gifts come to us, back in Ephesians 6, these gifts come to us from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Those titles emphasize our relationship to God. He has become our Father; that’s why He’s generous with us. And Christ has become our Lord, our Master, our Provider. These blessings come to us from One with whom we have a relationship.

Now that brings us to the blessing itself. Notice Paul uses three words to describe the blessing that He wants God to give us: peace, love, and grace. Let’s look at the first one: peace. Verse 23, “Peace be to the brethren.” It begins here with the traditional Hebrew greeting, *sholom*, “peace.” He says I want this for the brethren, that is, for my Christian brothers. That’s the same group in verse 24 He calls “those who love our Lord Jesus Christ.” He’s talking about all true Christians. So, what is this peace? Here he’s not referring to the objective peace. We already have that. The peace Romans 5:1 talks about “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.” We are having peace with God. In other words, the conflict with God is over. The war is over. God has laid down His arms against us. There’s no more conflict. We have objective peace with God. That’s not what he’s talking about here. We already have that. He’s talking instead about the peace that results from that: peace with God and peace with others. That’s objective but there is a subjective side to it, a subjective peace of heart that results. Look over in chapter 2 of Ephesians. You remember Paul makes much of this issue of peace. Ephesians chapter 2 beginning in verse 11 he talks about the fact that you know the Jews and the Gentiles were at in conflict; they were at odds with one another. They didn’t fit together. “But now,” verse 13, “in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off” that’s the Gentiles, “have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For [Christ] Himself is our peace.” Now notice what Christ did. First of all, He made objective peace with other believers who aren’t like us: Jew and Gentile. Notice He made both groups into one. He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. He abolished in His flesh the law, which was the real sticking point so that, verse 15, He might in Himself “make the two” the Jew and Gentile “into one new man,” that’s the church, “thus establishing peace.” So, peace between Jew and Gentile, peace between brothers and sisters in the church. That’s not the only kind of peace Christ is to us though. Verse 16, and He’s our peace in this sense “that He might reconcile [them] both” Jew and

Gentile “to God through the cross.” So, peace with each other and peace with God—objective peace.

We already enjoy a state of concord with God and with others in the church that might be different than we are because Jesus brought peace, objective real peace. But and here’s where His blessing comes in, our experience of those realities needs to continue to grow. That’s why in chapter 4 verse 3, He says even though you have peace, I want that bond of peace to continue. You’ve got to work to preserve it. It needs to work out in reality in your life. And in chapter 6 verse 15, you remember He talks about coming to grips with, part of the armor, is coming to grips with and understand the implications of the peace that the gospel has brought. So, if we’re Christians we’ve already experienced peace objectively. The end of the war with God, the end of the war with each other and, subjectively, we now have an inner sense of peace, but Paul is asking that we would understand these blessings and experience them in greater and deeper ways. Here’s what Paul’s praying: he’s saying, it’s my hope and prayer that God would continue to grant you a greater understanding of the objective peace you have with God and with each other and a greater subjective experience of peace in your hearts, in all of life, in all of life’s circumstances. The application of that objective peace to your mind and heart and attitude as you live through life. That’s how he ends 2 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 16 he says, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance.” That’s what he’s saying, I want you to have peace. I want you to be able to apply the objective peace that’s been purchased by Christ in your life so that peace of mind and heart becomes a reality whatever your circumstances may be. He says, I want the brethren to experience peace.

He goes on to say there’s something else he wishes for them. Love. Love with faith. Look at verse 23, “love with faith.” We already have faith in Christ. Remember back in chapter 2 he told us faith had been given to us as a gift. Now he wants us to add to our faith, love. And again, Paul is not specific he just says “love.” What does he mean? Well, I think again he’s pulling on what he’s taught in this letter, so he means several things. First of all, he means, I want you to grow in your understanding of God’s love for you in Christ. Isn’t that what he spent a lot of the first part of this letter doing? Go back to Ephesians 1 verse 4. He talks about “sovereign election” and in verse 4 the end of the verse he says, “In love God predestined us to adoption as sons through Christ Jesus to Himself.” He says, “I want you to know that in eternity past God set His love on you and chose

you to be His own.” If you weren’t here when we went through this series on election, I encourage you to go back and listen because it’s foundational: to know that God loved you by name in eternity past and chose you to be His own. He wants us to understand His eternal love for us. In chapter 2 verse 4, he says in terms of our salvation, in time God was “rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” So not only did God love us in eternity past and choose us but in time God loved us and saved us out of our spiritual death. He wants us to grow in our knowledge of that. Look at chapter 3 verse 17. Paul’s in the middle of a prayer and he’s praying for them that they would be rooted and grounded in God’s love; in other words, that they would have a foundational understanding of God’s love for them and “be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love” which Christ has for us which surpasses knowledge and when that happens you’ll “be filled up to all the fullness of God.” Paul says it’s crucial for you to grow in your knowledge of God’s love for you. That becomes foundational in your Christian life. So, when he says “My blessing on you is love” he means that you would grow in your knowledge of God’s love for you. But he also means that you would grow in your love for Jesus Christ. Isn’t that how he ends? Look at the last verse, verse 24. “Those who love our Lord Jesus Christ.” So, he wants us to not only grow in our knowledge of God’s love for us but to grow in our love for God, our love for Christ. He also wants us to grow in our love for one another. Ephesians chapter 4 verse 2, you are to show “tolerance for one another in love.” Down in chapter 5 verse 2, if you’re going to be imitators of God, you must “walk in love.” Your life must be characterized by love for other people. So, he wants us to grow in our love for one another as well. Paul’s prayer, our Lord’s blessing on us, is that we would begin in deeper and fuller ways to experience all of those dimensions of love: a better knowledge of God’s love for us in Christ; more intense love and devotion to Jesus Christ; and a greater love for one another. So, when he says “I want you to experience love” that’s what he means.

The last blessing is grace. The last blessing is the first one that Paul began in this letter back in chapter 1 verse 2. Notice verse 24, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice it is specifically for every true Christian. Paul was praying that every true Christian, the first century Christians who heard this letter read to them by Tychicus, for us, for all the Christians in between, for every true Christian, he says, my wish and my prayer, my blessing is this: grace! May you know ever increasing measures of God’s grace in your life. Paul begins and ends almost

every New Testament letter he wrote with a blessing or a prayer for God's grace. Why is that? Listen, if you don't hear anything else I said this morning get this: the most essential thing for your Christian life's survival and growth is grace. Grace is what saved you. But grace isn't merely good just for salvation and then you sort of put it in the drawer and move on and now it's all up to me. No. Grace is what sanctifies you as well. It is God's goodness to you that causes your sanctification. Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:10 he says, "May the God of all grace sanctify you wholly." It's God's grace that affects that change in our lives. Not only does He save us by grace He sanctifies us by grace. It's also what's necessary for all true service and ministry. Over and over again in the New Testament Paul says that I labor by grace; it's Christ's grace in me that is causing me to be effective in my ministry. You know what the New Testament says? Everything you need spiritually ultimately flows to you from the grace of God. So, there is nothing you need more in your life than God's grace. Paul is essentially saying, I want God to continue to pour out on you an increasing measure of His goodness even though you deserve exactly the opposite. That's what he's saying. I want you to keep on and on experiencing this display of God's grace.

And notice how he ends this letter verse 24, "With incorruptible love." Now, you'll notice that the word "love" is in italics. That's because in the original Greek text it's not there. It's been added by the translators for clarity. The Greek text ends with two words: "in incorruption." "In incorruption." In other words, something, and we don't know yet what the something is, is not subject to decay. It's not subject to disillusion. It's not subject to interruption. In other words, it doesn't decline, it doesn't stop temporarily, and it doesn't stop permanently. It just keeps on going. Now what is that modifying? What is "in incorruption"? Well, it's unclear. There are several choices. It could be modifying "love"; that's what the NAS translators thought. In that case, it would mean that the Christians' love for Christ never knows corruption. In other words, it's an undying love, the Christian just keeps on and on and on loving Christ. It doesn't decline, it doesn't go away temporarily, it doesn't go away permanently. That may be what Paul is saying. He may also be saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is "in incorruption." In other words, He will never know corruption. He is immortal. The third option and frankly the one that I'm tempted to think Paul means here is that that little expression "in incorruption" is modifying the word "grace." In this case, Paul would be saying in his prayer, he says, it's my prayer that all true Christians would continue to experience the outpouring of God's grace in incorruption, in other words, for ever and ever and ever.

I think that's what Paul's saying because he's already said that. Go back to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 7. Paul says, God saved you, verse 7, "so that" when you were dead, He made you alive "so that for this reason in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." As the waves of age after age break on the shore of eternity God will keep on showing us kindness through His grace. That is, He will keep on giving people who deserve exactly the opposite His goodness. I think that's what Paul is saying as he completes this letter. He's saying my prayer for you is that you will experience God's grace in increasing measure not just in this life but in incorruption forever and ever and ever. As one writer says, "The letter which opened with a bold glance into the eternal past and God's electing love, closes with the outlook of an immortal hope in the ever-increasing grace of God." It's Paul's wish and prayer that God would mediate these blessings to us. And it's our Lord's prayer that these things would be mediated to us. The question is how? How do we get grace? How do we get love? How do we get peace? The answer is through the Word of God, through this letter. How do I know that? Do you remember what Paul wrote to the Ephesian or what he said rather to the Ephesian elders and Luke wrote it for us in Acts 20 when he saw them probably for the last time, he gathers them together and towards the end of his little speech to them he says this: "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace." His word which mediates grace into your life. And then he goes on to say, "and is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." All of that is what the word of God will do. This is the word of His grace. The message of His grace that mediates grace into our lives. This is how you get these blessings from God. He doesn't zap you with them; you get them as you study and read and meditate and think on His Word. In fact, if you've been here with us each week as we've journeyed through this great book, if your heart has been open to the word, I can promise you that this has happened because I've seen it in my own life and as you have meditated on and thought about these truths, God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ has given you more peace. He's given you a greater understanding of the peace you have with Him and more peace of heart as you endure the trials and circumstances of this life. He's given you love—a greater understanding of His love for you. A greater love for Him and a greater love for one another. And through this letter as we've studied it together, He's given you a greater expression and understanding of grace as His goodness has flooded into your life and has changed you as it's changed me over the four years we've been going through it together. That's how these blessings become ours. And they become ours because that is His great

heart. That is our Lord's great heart for us that if it's a spiritual need for us, it's a necessity for Him. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this wonderful conclusion. And Lord, we do thank You for the apostle Paul. But Lord, we thank You more for Your work in him and that in him we see reflected the great heart of our Lord for us. Father, remind us, remind us of these great truths that if it is a care to us, it is a concern to Him, to You. Father remind us that if it's a spiritual need for us, You are amazingly generous and it becomes a necessity for You to meet that need. Remind us, oh God, that in Christ You've given us all things. How can You give us Your greatest gift, Your Son and not also with Him freely give us every other spiritual blessing we need? Father, I pray for myself. I pray for this flock that You've allowed me to help shepherd. Father, I pray that we would know in increasing measure Your peace. Understanding the peace we have with You and applying that to the daily vicissitudes of life and having peace in the middle of all of our circumstances. Father, may we experience a greater measure of love. May we understand more profoundly Your love for us in Christ and may we love You in return and may we love each other. And Father, most of all we pray that in this life whatever time You give us here and into the eternal future that You would continue with wave after wave of Your grace in our lives. May You do good to us, oh God, who deserve only the opposite from Your hand. We pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.