

Ephesians 6:23-24

Introduction

So this morning we come to the end of Ephesians – to Paul’s final, closing words. Paul began his letter with this prayer-wish: “**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:2) The rest of Paul’s letter has really been all-consumed with these twin themes: **Grace** and **peace**. And this is so because these twin themes are really just the twin pillars of a much **bigger**, and a far **grander** theme.

So now as Paul ends his letter, he comes back to these same, two, simple words – now in reverse order: “**Peace** to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Grace** be with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility.” (Or perhaps we could translate, “with an incorruptible love.”)

I. “Peace to the brothers, and love with faith...”

For the first time in Ephesians, Paul refers to all of his readers (and really to all Christians) as “brothers” – or we could say “brothers and sisters.” But it’s not like it comes out of the blue, is it? We’ve already been thoroughly prepared for this.

The great theme of Ephesians has been that even before God laid the foundations of the world, His plan and purpose has been to unite **all things** in His Son, Jesus Christ. This was once a mystery hidden deep in God – unknowable to us. But now God’s purpose has been *revealed* to you and me – and revealed not just in words, but in this living, breathing, visible reality called the Church. God’s *eternal* purpose for the uniting of all things in Christ is being worked out *today* in the bringing together of formerly alienated and hostile people in the **one body** of Christ.

And so now it’s **in this light** that Paul *again* expresses this prayer-wish at the end of his letter: “**Peace** to the brothers.” This peace is something we *have* – right now. We *are*, as a fact of reality, brothers and sisters in the one body of Christ.

- ✓ Ephesians 2:14-18 – For he himself is our **peace**, who has made both things one, and has broken down the dividing wall of partition—the hostility—having abolished in His flesh the law of commandments [expressed] in decrees, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making **peace**, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached **peace** to you who were far off and **peace** to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Peace is something we *have* as those who *are now* brothers and sisters in Christ. And because peace is something we *have*, therefore, it’s the very thing Paul earnestly wishes and prays for the brothers. As Wood writes:

“This is more than a farewell greeting; it is a prayer for reconciliation. Paul *longs* to see the whole brotherhood of believers in Ephesus and its environs—Jews and Gentiles alike—at peace with each other in the one body of Christ.”

“Peace *to* the brothers, *and love with faith...*” This peace that we *have* because of the “new man” that we *are* together in Christ is experienced, it’s lived out in the exercise and the constant practice of mutual *love* – a love that flows from the one *faith* that we all have in common with each other. (cf. Lincoln)

- ✓ Ephesians 1:4 — He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in *love*.
- ✓ Ephesians 1:15 — For this reason I for my part—having heard of your *faith* in the Lord Jesus and your *love* toward *all* the saints—I never cease giving thanks for you.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:1-6 — I urge you therefore—I, the prisoner in the Lord—to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in *love*, being fervent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of *peace*—one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one *faith*, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

And now here at the very end of his letter, Paul expresses once again His heart’s desire and prayer: “Peace *to* the brothers, *and love with faith...*” But *why*? Why is this such an intense *longing* for Paul? The answer, for Paul, was this: because Christ is worthy. “Peace to the brothers, and love with faith...” **Why?** Because **Christ** is **worthy!!!** We *are* brothers and sisters in the one body of Christ *not* primarily for our sake, but for *His*. Paul says in Romans:

- ✓ Romans 8:29 — For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, *in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers*.

We read in Colossians:

- ✓ Colossians 1:18 — And he is the head of *the body, the church*. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, *that in everything he might be preeminent*.

And we know from Ephesians that God’s bringing together of formerly alienated and hostile people in the one body of Christ is *all* for the *sake* of His Son (it’s not *about* you and me) – so that *in Christ* all things might be united, things in heaven and things on earth, *in Him*. So why, then, does Paul close his letter with this earnest wish and prayer, “Peace to the brothers, and love with faith”? Because **Christ** is **worthy**. Because it is through the ever-increasing experience and display of our *oneness in Christ* that the glory and the preeminence of Christ is made known. And *then in His preeminence and glory* is found our only true happiness and joy. His glory, and then secondarily our joy, cannot be separated from the embracing, and the affirming, and the nitty-gritty living out of our oneness in Christ.

Paul says, “He Himself is our peace.” (2:14) But if this is so, then the whole point of our peace *must be His* preeminence. So why do we cultivate the quality of *long-suffering*? Why do we

bear with one another in love? Why do we *forgive* when we have been sinned against? Why do we walk with all *humility and gentleness* toward each other? (cf. 4:1-3, 31-32) Not *primarily* for any advantage to me or for any benefit to you, but because *anything else* would be to hide the *glory and preeminence* of Christ, who has made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:14-18). Why do we love each other, being fervent to keep the unity of the Spirit? Because, with Paul, we have had our eyes opened to that great mystery of God's will to see His Son exalted and lifted up through the uniting of all things in Him.

“Peace to the brothers, and love with faith...”

II. “...from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Everything comes *from* God. All is a gift of His grace. (cf. Thielman) Not just the objective reality of the peace that we already have, but even our subjective, obedient living out of this peace in genuine love for our brothers and sisters. And why should that be? Because God never leaves the glory and preeminence of His Son to chance. God will not leave the glory and preeminence of His Son to the hope and wish that we might love one another. Instead, even our exercise of love for one another is a sovereign gift of His grace that He bestows on us *by*, and *through*, and *for the sake of His Son*, Jesus Christ.

It's true that even in the Church, we do not yet see all things [fully] subjected to Him (Heb. 2:8). To prove that point, every single one of us need look no further than ourselves. And yet being *assured* of God's *purpose*, that it *cannot be thwarted*; and knowing that the accomplishment of the preeminence of Christ in our midst is not *from* us, but *from* God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, we don't grow weary. Therefore, we earnestly, fervently, with all of our hearts, strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of *peace*. *Because* we have come to see the *worthiness* of Christ. Because we have come to share in the Father's passion for the glory of His Son. Because now it's in the accomplishing of Christ's preeminence that we find our chief happiness and joy. And so this brings us to the very last words of Paul's epistle:

III. “Grace be with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility.” [Or, “with an incorruptible love”]

At the end of Ephesians, we're reminded that what matters is not what we know about Christ, but that we know and *love* Christ *Himself*. All of this doctrine in Ephesians—all of this Gospel truth—it's all summed up in a *Person*. Its *source* is a Person, it exists today in a Person, its *goal* is a Person. And so what Paul has been calling us to all along in Ephesians is the *love* of that *Person* – the love of Christ. Knowing the truth will never do us any good if it's divorced from a genuine, sincere, pure, and undivided *love* for our Lord Jesus Christ. And this love for Christ is unlike any other kind of love. Paul writes at the end of 1 Corinthians:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 16:22 (NASB/ESV) — If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Our Lord, come!

Does that sound wrong to us? Do our hearts not resonate deeply with Paul's words? But there is no hatefulness in these words – only love! You see, because of who Christ is—because He is the

one who fills all in all (1:23), because He is the goal and end of all creation – things in heaven and things on earth (1:9-10), because all things have been subjected under His feet, because He has been given as head over all things to the church (1:22)—because of who Christ is, therefore any true *love* for Christ is necessarily consumed with His *preeminence*. So Paul doesn't just pronounce the curse on those who do not love the Lord, but he goes on immediately to cry out, "Our Lord, come!" "Our Lord, may your preeminence be known and displayed in all the earth!" And so this love for Christ overflows in our obedience to Him as King, and especially in our unconditional, long-suffering *love* for the brothers and sisters – for each other. Because of *who Christ is*, therefore those who love Christ are those whose chief happiness and joy is found in the lifting up, and the making known of the preeminence of Christ.

But as Calvin writes: "Most men, while they are not unwilling to make some professions of religion, entertain exceedingly low notions of Christ, and worship him with pretended homage." So here at the end of Ephesians, perhaps the most important question to be asked is this: What are your notions of Christ? Hodge says:

"Love for Christ includes adoring admiration of his person, a desire for his presence, zeal for his glory, and devotion to his service. It need not be ecstatic, but it [will always] control us."

Do you—do I—*love* Christ?

"*Grace* be with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility." On the one hand, it's because of the "exceeding riches" of God's saving *grace* "freely bestowed" and "lavished upon us in the Beloved" that we are *able* to love Christ (cf. Braune; Eph. 1:15-19; 3:14-19). But we can also say that it's only those who love Christ—those who are most happy when He is most preeminent—it's only these people who will continuously be growing in that *experiential knowledge* of God's grace – of His underserved, inexhaustible favor and love to us. *These are the ones* who will know ever-increasing hope in despondency, ever deepening joy in sorrow, ever-increasing patience in suffering, ever-increasing confidence when under assault. These are the ones who will know in ever increasing measure the constant, *felt enjoyment* of the favor of God. (cf. Braune)

Conclusion

The question to be asked at the end of Ephesians is this: What are your notions of Christ? Do you *love* Him? Are you most happy when *He* is most preeminent? And have you come to see—have *we* come to see—that *His preeminence* is most gloriously displayed in our *love* for one another? As one person has written:

"The whole of vital Christianity is contained in *love to Jesus*. Those then who love this Jesus with their whole heart, so that in this love they look to *Him* alone, desire *Him* alone, follow *Him* alone, deny themselves for *Him*, willingly bear His cross and their cross after *Him*, living to *Him* and dying to *Him*—those are Christians, are God's children." (Passavant; quoted in Braune)

*“Peace to the brothers [and sisters], and love with faith
from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Grace be with all of those
who LOVE our Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love.”*