

## Peace, Love, Faith, and Grace from God

Ephesians 6:19–23

Paul's last sentence in the body of the letter before he closes it remind them that the reason that he is in jail is because he proclaimed the gospel. Hatred for the Gospel and its proclaimers did not begin this past week. Paul lays hold of God's sovereignty over his life even in difficulties. Pray that words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. He knows God has providentially put him in jail to preach to the king of the most powerful government on the face of the Earth at that time. It's as though he says, God put me in prison in Rome so that I proclaim the Gospel to the most influential human leader of the time. Pray that I'm not timid, but that I speak boldly and call him to believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior. Here is someone who understands that the world's greatest need is to know Jesus Christ. Paul has forgotten what lies behind; he is straining forward to what lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. He asks them to pray for the empowering of the Spirit as he does so. Let those of us who are mature think this way. (Philippians 3:13-15a)

Then, a sweet closing. **Ephesians 6:21–22** — 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.

Note that Paul always serves with a team. He is not a Lone Ranger. We could learn from this, and help each grow in faithfulness and effectiveness as we serve together.

Second, we see a mutual love of the apostle for God's people, and God's people loving Paul as they are concerned about him. RC Sproul notes this mutual love and notes that this is a model for love and concern to be expressed to pastors and elders, who are given responsibility for shepherding your souls. Sproul says the church does well to remember that the apostle is a man, and your leaders are just men who have needs like everyone else. He writes, "We should be concerned about their well-being just as God has been trusted to them the care of our well-being."

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Then the benediction — the good pronouncement, not from Paul, but from God. Paul is not the source of these things, but God. This is what is theirs *in Christ*: peace, love, and faith from God, who intervened in your spiritual death and your illuminated your darkened mind and redeemed you. Then Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus with love and corruptible – that is, God's real, abiding, enduring love.

Having received this letter, how did the church at Ephesus do over the 20 or 30 years? Turn with me briefly to Revelation 2. The assignment of every believer, the greatest commandment is that we love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our obedience is to flow out of love — not mere duty or simply religious responsibility. The first act of repentance turning from love of sin and self to love for God. He wants our heart in communion, not passionless performance. It's possible to go through the motions and look good to man, but God looks on the heart and calls to communion. Let's read **Revelation 2:1–7** — “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup>“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. <sup>3</sup>I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup>Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup>Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

Love for God must never be replaced with checklists. There is never a time we are effective in ministry if we are not first loving God. Let it be written over the whole of what we do, and let us repent of unworthy, mid-grade love for God. A white-hot love with all the heart, soul, mind and strength is the bull's-eye. Now, let's hear the letter just as they did at first reading in Ephesus. You may follow along or simply listen.