

Ephesians 6:21-24 Stay The Course Of Grace"

As we look back on this letter it's important to keep in mind the intent of what Paul has been trying to convey to these Christians in Ephesus. This was a time in Church history where Christians really needed to count the cost to follow Christ, as it should be in every age.

This letter was written sometime in the year of 60 AD along with Colossians and Philemon which were written in the same year. This was a time of turmoil for Jew and Gentile alike. For the Jews they were tired of Roman conquest and many had taken it upon themselves to come against the government.

A few years earlier there was the rise of the Jewish Zealots who led revolts and caused general problems for Rome. This led to Rome's further displeasure with the Jewish population. Whether Christian Jew or not, all Jews were viewed as potential enemies of the state.

Two years after this letter was written to the Ephesians the infamous Roman Emperor Nero "revived the wide-ranging law of treason, and people were executed on suspicion of offense. In AD 64 a great fire ruined Rome. Nero lavishly rebuilt the city, but rumor held that he had started the fire himself to make room for his new palace and that he had recited poetry while watching the blaze. To avert this suspicion Nero blamed the Christians for the fire, thus initiating the first major Roman persecution of [Christ's church]. Executions increased in AD 65, when an assassination plot was uncovered." (Grolliers Multi-media Encyclopedia)

It was not easy to be a Christian in those days. But it was imperative to grow in the faith and Paul understood, that for this predominantly Gentile church in Ephesus, there were going to be problems which might cause these believers to have their attention diverted elsewhere and thus tempt them to go back to their old ways.

These Gentile believers not only had family and friends ostracize them for believing in a new religion, that was not sanctioned by Rome, but that this new religion was directly associated with the Jews who were not very popular with Rome, since the Messiah was a Jew.

So, how do you encourage the body of Christ to stay the course? You give them the truth of who this Messiah is and what He has provided so that you can stay the course and grow in your relationship to Him as He builds you up for works of service, extending His kingdom.

From the very first part of this letter we see Paul doing just this. In chapter one he begins with worship of our Lord as a way to set the stage for the One we serve, who is the eternal God.

EPH 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

In chapter two Paul gives the universal scope of Christ's purpose to save and unite both Jew and Gentile.

EPH 2:17-18 "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."

In chapter three Paul describes the goal of the body of Christ in the world.

EPH 3:10-11, 19 "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

In the first half of chapter four Paul then begins to bring in some of the practical applications to the truths he's taught in chapters one through three. And he puts into perspective our responsibilities in light of the fact that we've been given so great a salvation.

EPH 4:1 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

From the middle of chapter four to the middle of chapter six he reminds the believer of how we are able to walk worthy of the calling which we've received in Christ, as we consider that we have been given a new life and are indwelt with the Spirit of the living God.

EPH 4:22-24 "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its

deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

And then, so as to keep in mind that this new life includes all of the blessings which were described in the first chapter as coming from above, Paul begins to sum up by showing us that it is the power of God in the armor of God that enables us to go forward and do the work He's called us to do with the gifts He's given us.

EPH 6:11-12 "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

I'm sure there were those who were tempted to think that their struggle was against the Roman government and those unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who felt that this new religion was just one more obstacle in the way of the peace of Rome.

Paul helps the believer keep his perspective on the spiritual aspects of Christ's kingdom. Only as the kingdom of God, proclaimed through the gospel, will the kingdoms of this world be effected to the glory of God. And that's why he could earnestly seek the prayers of these Ephesians in joining him to extend Christ's kingdom even while being incarcerated in Rome.

Paul has spent this entire letter encouraging the saints in the city of Ephesus while being a prisoner of Rome and yet even under such circumstances he could ask these Ephesian believers to do something very special for him as he now asks for some encouragement.

EPH 6:19-20 "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

He may have been a prisoner of Rome, but he was still the ambassador of the Creator of the universe. Which do you think carries more weight? Paul understood that no matter where he was geographically, or even if his circumstance seemed to be hopeless, he was still serving the living God and was still responsible to declare God's greatness and His message of hope found in Christ.

Paul's main concern was for the souls of men. And through his example that should be our main concern as well. And so, as he ends this letter he once again turns his thoughts back to his readers and their needs.

EPH 6:21-24 "Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. 23 Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

Tychicus is the one who has delivered this letter to the saints in Ephesus, which was a coastal city on the west coast of Asia Minor, known today as Western Turkey, and is the same one who carried a similar letter to the Colossians which was about 125 miles east of Ephesus .

Tychicus was a faithful servant of God and a faithful friend of Paul's on whom he could rely. The first time we meet Tychicus is in the book of Acts. In fact, it's interesting, there in the book of Acts, that it's in the context of Paul inadvertently causing a riot in the city of Ephesus a few years before.

He was in the city of Ephesus when Demetrius the silversmith accused Paul and his friends of blaspheming the goddess Artemis or Diana, thus jeopardizing his trade which made statues or idols of this false god.

In all of the confusion on that day Paul found his life in danger and the disciples tried to protect him as he wanted to go into the fray and be there with his friends.

ACT 19:30-32 "Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. 32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there."

Paul then decided to leave the area and go to Greece. Well, a number of the disciples accompanied him and we read of who some of these disciples were who followed him from Ephesus.

ACT 20:4 "He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from

Derbe, Timothy also, and *Tychicus* and Trophimus from the province of Asia."

Tychicus was a Gentile believer who loved this Jewish man named Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentile world. He followed Paul and ministered to him because the Lord had laid it on the heart of Tychicus to do so. A good part of his ministry was to support the ministry of Paul.

And now, as Paul is a prisoner in Rome, Tychicus is by his side as he writes this letter to the Ephesian Christians. You talk about dedication and faithfulness to the cause of encouraging the saints around the world. Tychicus is your man.

We need more Tychicus' in the church-at-large today. We need saints throughout the world in the church who are dedicated to holding up the arms of their leaders and supporting them as they encourage the saints to go forward in their walk with Christ.

Keep in mind that as Paul is in Rome Tychicus needs to take this letter to Asia Minor which is over a thousand miles away. He will need to make preparations to be away from Paul for months as he travels back to the city where Paul had caused the riots which led to his fleeing from that area once before.

This was a potentially dangerous situation. And yet Tychicus makes the journey around 60 AD, knowing that in his hands are the very words, not just of Paul, but of the living God who inspired these words. Tychicus knew full well that these letters he had in his possession were words from God and that the saints needed to hear from the Lord as they heard and were encouraged through the pen of Paul.

Of course, the Ephesians were not the only ones who would receive letters. Tychicus would also deliver other letters on the same trip; one to Colossae.

COL 4:7-8 "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts."

By the way, Tychicus was not traveling alone. One of his traveling friends was a man who somehow found his way to Rome and to Paul and who was now going home to deal with a little problem that Paul would address in another letter which was addressed to Philemon. You might remember the name Onesimus.

COL 4:9 "He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here."

Of course Onesimus was the slave of Philemon. And the two letters addressed to Ephesus and Colossae would be accompanied by this third letter to Philemon who lived in Colossae and whose home was used to house the church there in Colossae.

PHM 1:10-20 "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, (Onesimus means useful) who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him - who is my very heart -back to you. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced." 15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good - 16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back - not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ."

I suspect that Tychicus also had a word of encouragement for Philemon as he told him how Onesimus was useful in Paul's ministry and how he had now given his life to Christ to serve God in a way that far exceeded how he could serve as a slave in Philemon's household.

But, Tychicus went on from there to return to Paul and was later sent out again to deliver letters to Titus and Timothy. Two years later, around 62 AD, it appears that Tychicus would be sent to Crete which is a large island in the Mediterranean sea. This is where Titus was located as he ministered to and pastored churches on that island. And Tychicus was probably sent to encourage this pastor.

TIT 3:12 "As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there."

A year later, in 63 AD, Tychicus would go to Ephesus for Paul to encourage these Ephesian Christians one more time three years after the letter we're now looking at was first delivered.

2TI 4:11-12 "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus."

Paul describes him as a beloved brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. And what we see here is how Paul views other Christians who are sold out for Christ and who demonstrate that dedication with being servants for Christ.

The thing which distinguishes Tychicus is not how handsome he was, or how tall he was or how much money he had or even the particular ways he was gifted by the Holy Spirit. Rather, he is distinguished as one who is faithful to do the work God called him to.

And for this reason he is recognized by Paul and is forever inscribed in the pages of the word of God. This is God's way of recognizing the faithfulness of one particular servant who was not looking for any notoriety, but who just kept the course God had for him.

How we all should be encouraged to stay the course and remain faithful to love and serve our God. We may not get recognition from anyone else in this world, but our service to our God will not go unnoticed by Him.

Tychicus probably had the privilege to teach and preach and share the gospel to many people as he traveled with Paul and yet in the pages of the Scriptures he is best seen as a messenger delivering someone else's letters.

He was a humble servant who loved his pastor and desired nothing more than to see the ministry of Paul go forward as the Holy Spirit enabled him to do so, knowing that as he supported Paul he was in fact serving the living God who gave him the privilege and the responsibility to serve in that capacity with Paul.

Whatever we're called to do may we do it heartily for the Lord as did Tychicus who comforted the hearts of the Ephesians as he brought news about Paul and how he was doing in Rome.

As we end this letter we see that Paul gives one more encouragement as he closes. And he ends this letter in the same

way he started it. He says in EPH 1:2 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

EPH 6:23-24 "Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

The NAS puts it this way. "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 a love incorruptible."

Here Paul speaks of peace and love and grace. The peace he has in mind is the peace we have with the Father as the result of Jesus Christ taking our penalty for sin and taking away that enmity God had toward us because of our sin.

Outside of Christ we are at war with God and we will only receive judgment and wrath as Paul describes in ROM 5:9-10 "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

If we are not His enemies, because we've placed our faith in His Son and His redemptive work on our behalf, then we are at true peace with Him and nothing can change that status. We are now part of the family of God and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

ROM 5:1 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have [present tense] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,..."

Peace with God is a legal status which ensures that we will never suffer His wrath, but there is an experiential peace which passes understanding which we know to be a work of the Spirit in our lives. In fact, it's referred to as a fruit of the Spirit.

GAL 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, PEACE, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Legal peace produces an inner peace. Ask any prisoner who's been accused of a crime and then pronounced not guilty after all the evidence is in. His legal peace with the state comes from the

judge's pronouncement, but after the pronouncement comes the burden which has been lifted from his shoulders.

That's the kind of peace which the Spirit is working in our lives. But we must always keep in mind that this peace is a direct result of the grace of God that Paul refers to here in our text. It is this grace that Paul desires for these Ephesian believers as well as us.

This grace is given to us from the God who created all things. In fact, what's interesting about verse 23 is that Paul makes it clear that this God is none other than the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek language makes it clear that when the word *kurios* (Lord) is used in reference to Jesus Christ it is speaking of Jesus Christ being supreme in authority as Lord of heaven and earth. This verse is a clear reference to the deity (Godhood) of Jesus Christ, who is placed in the same position as the Father being referred to as God.

In other words, Paul is saying that the God who gives peace and love and grace is the God we know as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God revealed in three persons. It is this God alone who gives all good gifts, and these gifts given to His people are what we know as grace given by Him.

Grace is that gift which is undeserved. We started our journey with an undeserved grace from God, which brought us forgiveness and life eternal in Christ, and we continue our walk and journey in the grace of God as He lavishes us with every spiritual blessing from above.

But you'll notice that Paul's prayer for those he would have touched by the grace of God are those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible. The word incorruptible comes from the Greek word *aphtharsia* which means incorruption but carries with it the idea of purity, and sincerity.

The KJV uses the phrase a "love in sincerity" while the NIV uses the phrase "undying love." The idea here is that this love is one which has as its object the one who first loved us and died for our sin that we might have life. It is a love which is incorruptible in the sense that it is not a love like the worlds' which is full of corruption.

Our love for God and others is a love which is like God's love since we have been given His life and are daily being conformed

into the image of Christ who loved us in this way. And what Paul would have us see is that we who love our Lord Jesus Christ can expect His continued grace throughout our lives.

It is a grace we should seek and a grace we should pray for each other. It is a grace we can rely on, knowing that the God who gave us the free gift of eternal life is the same God who continues to bless and nourish us on the hope we have in Christ. He is the God we can trust, not only with our eternal life, but our present lives as well. He is faithful in all His ways and a God who keeps all His promises.

ROM 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."