

A FAITHFULLY LOVING CHURCH

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Open your Bibles with me, if you haven't already to the book of Ephesians. What we are looking at tonight is Paul's conclusion in the letter written to the Ephesians. And I think this is a fitting text considering this is our last GCF of the year. After this, we will all hit the books, dig in our heels, endure finals week, travel home, try to find a job, start searching for a place to live in the summer, and try to keep pace in life. There is much ahead of us as we view the coming three months.

And I want you to hear this message with all of those influences weighing on you, but I also want you to try and read this with the emotions that the church in Ephesus had when they read these final sentences.

The Ephesian's probably have a little bit of the yearbook syndrome going on here. You all know what I'm talking about. What's the first thing you do when you get a year book, you look up all the instances where you are pictured in it. It's not that you don't care about the other people, or that you don't value those pictures, but you want to see how it relates specifically to you first of all.

The Ephesian's know how Paul writes, they know that typically he greets his audience in the first part, shares some teaching in the middle, but then closes with a personal conclusion and greeting at the end of the letter.

So they are excited to hear from Paul, but not in selfish and vain way, but with all sincerity. If we look at Paul's relationship to this church, we can see this is. On Paul's second missionary journey he made his first appearance in Ephesus. And when he got there he went straight to the synagogue and began to evangelize to the Jews there. After he has spent some time with them, they asked him to stay longer, but Paul declined.

Then on his third missionary journey Paul goes back and he meets up with some disciples there, but the disciples still consider themselves followers of John the Baptist, so Paul preaches Christ to them, for two years, but eventually has to leave because Ephesus became hostile to Paul and his Christian friends. There was nearly a riot in Ephesus because the idol workers were so frustrated with Paul because no one was buying their idols anymore.

Then, Paul decides to head towards Jerusalem. This meant something to Paul, he knew that in going to Jerusalem, he would most likely be arrested. Some of his disciples tried to stop him but he says, I'm not only willing to be arrested, but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, he stops in a town called Miletus and calls the Ephesian elders to come visit him. Look at what he says to them: **Acts 20:22-32, 36-38**

Last time the Ephesians spoke to Paul they thought it would be his last, but they got a letter, a letter from a man they thought was dead. Because of this they are anxious not only to hear what Paul has to say, but to treasure what Paul has to say. How should they apply this letter, what are they to do in light of this news.

It is with this hope they read **Ephesians 6:21-24**. Let's pray.

We are going to look at the two parts in this conclusion: Paul's Hope and Paul's Prayer. The first is **Paul's Hope. Eph 6:21-22**

Paul is hoping for two things, That Tychicus would come and fill in the church on Paul's current situation, and that he would encourage the hearts of the believers.

Now Paul's current situation is that he is imprisoned in Rome. We saw this last week when Stephen spoke:

Eph 6:19-20

You've got to love Paul's zeal. He is praying for boldness to preach while he is in prison. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Miletus? I'm going to leave you and wolves will come and attack your flock. Trial will happen, and Tychicus is coming back to them saying Paul is cemented inside of trial and he is killing it. Paul is in prison but his message hasn't changed, only the circumstances have.

But the unfortunate part is that Tychicus is coming, and Tychicus is going to encourage them. Why is this encouragement discouraging: because it's not Paul. Paul is writing this letter from the very prison cell he is probably going to die in. And he knows it. But what Paul knows more than that is that the gospel isn't tied up in a messenger, the gospel is rooted in its message. Tychicus will encourage the Ephesians because Tychicus will affirm the gospel in them.

How do you approach the gospel? We live in a generation filled with wonderful preachers, authors and podcasts, but don't lose sight of the message through the faithfulness of the messenger. The gospel trumps its delivery. This is how John Owen, the great theologian was saved. He and a friend went to what would have been the region's best celebrity pastor, but the pastor was out that day, instead it was some no-name who was filling the pulpit. While Owen's friend wanted to stay, Owen decided that they should stay. And through this no-name gospel witness, John Owen encountered the good news of his salvation, and we are better off today for it. The gospel has power regardless of the messenger.

Paul didn't just wish for the Ephesians to have knowledge of Christian conduct in the church, which is what this letter contains, but he also wanted them to be encouraged. He wanted them to be changed. Paul knew he wasn't coming back, he knew this was their last letter, so Paul was preparing them for life by securing them in the gospel.

Paul's hope is that they will be encouraged by Tychicus, but **Paul's Prayer** is more sure.

Eph 6:23-24

Why is this more sure? Because this is a work which only God can do. What Paul wishes for is a gospel response, what Paul prays for is a gospel identity.

While we need to hear the message, and believe in the message, the Holy Spirit needs to confirm that message deeply inside of us.

Now I want to point out something, Paul prays for two things, and the first one is interesting. **Eph 6:23**. Paul is praying for love with faith from God. The love Paul is talking about isn't a love and a faith. It's not that he wants the Ephesians to be a loving people and be a faithful people, he wants them to be a faithfully loving people.

Let me use marriage as an example. I love my wife. Most men, Christian or not, love their wives. This in one sense is raw love: love stripped from anything else. This is a noble love, and it is good, but it is incomplete. What happens if my love decides to change its flavor, what if I find other things more lovely, or what if I feel like Sarah has disqualified herself from my love? A love on its own cannot love perfectly. It lacks long term durability.

But because marriage, as Paul has already established, corresponds to Christ and the church, and because my love for Sarah is not Tyler loving Sarah on his own, but Tyler loving Sarah through Christ, my love gains a lasting permanence because of my faith. When I feel like not loving Sarah, my faith in a Christ who loved me while I was unlovable, pushes me to love her faithfully. A faith-based love stands up to all challenges because our faith is rooted in Christ.

Not only is this a faithful and faith-filled love, but it is a love that comes from God himself: **Eph 6:23**. God who is the author of our faith is also the fuel of our love.

This is what Paul is closing with, this is his set up for his final punch, but look at how Paul opened this book: **Eph 1:15-16**.

Paul has already affirmed the Ephesians in exactly what he wants them to do. Paul affirms them and then prays for them. You see this book, what John Stott calls the “Gospel of the Church” contains great doctrinal truths, great windows into our salvation, wonderful realities as to how we are to interact with one another, and methods in which we should stand firm, but at the heart of this book, weighing heavily over each verse is the theme of love.

Do not neglect faith-filled love. Now we may be as confident as the Ephesians in reading this. We have had a year of church, community group, GCF, retreats, devotions and community certainly this will sustain me through the summer.

The Ephesians thought the same thing. But 40 years after Paul penned this letter, the apostle John penned a little letter to the Ephesians. Only this letter was dictated by Christ himself, and it was recorded in the book of Revelation. **Rev 2:1-3**

So Christ himself speaks to the church in Ephesus and he says I know your works. I know you are enduring patiently, the church which Paul wrote to is not falling apart, its walls are strong, you are identifying those who are harmful to you and you are protecting the church just as I wrote you to do through the apostle Paul.

Ephesus looked good. But Christ looks past appearances. Look at what the risen son of God says to the church in **Rev 2:4-5**.

They lost the love. They had doctrine. They had community. They had long suffering and endurance, they had great weekly meetings, they had wonderful Bible reading times, they tweeted lots of great Biblical tweets, but they had lost their faith-filled love. And while the church looked healthy on the inside, it was really dying because the church wasn't going out.

It was an introverted church, a Christian ghetto if you will, where all the attention is turned inward with no regard for the outside world. They loved doctrine and purity, but they had lost a love of the Christ to which those doctrines pointed. And what did Christ say to them? **Rev 2:5**. Now Revelation creeps me out sometimes because I get lost in the symbols. But this one is easy for us to understand because Jesus already told us what the lampstands corresponded to: **Rev 1:20**.

The lampstand represents the church. Do you see the weight of Jesus' message? Find your love, or I will remove your church. (Recite 1 Cor 13:1-13)

You see a church without love fails to be a church. What is a bride who doesn't love her husband? But in love Christ came and sought us. In love Christ endured suffering and scorn on the cross. In love Christ was raised to the right hand of the father. In love our hearts were ransomed for the glory of God. The foundation

of our salvation is rooted in the merciful love of a glorious God and when we lose that affection we lose everything.

This was the problem with the desert monks of the 2nd century. They saw the sin in the world, and they removed themselves from it. They took to the hills of the desert and lived in isolation. They were extremely holy, they practiced all the spiritual disciplines, they memorized all the books of the Bible, but they were not in a position to love, because they had removed themselves from those who needed the message of love.

But look at Paul's final prayer, **Eph 6:24**. How do we gain that love, how do we break the bonds of introversion and take the encouragement we receive from one another and go out into the world as the church? We set Christ at the center of our love and love him with a love incorruptible.

This is what the gospel frees us to do. God in his sovereign plan chose the cross before the foundations of the world, Ephesians 1. So that those who were dead in their sinful hearts may have life through Christ, Ephesians 2. And that those blood bought children of Christ might make known the glory of God through the church, Ephesians 3. So that we may grow into a deeper knowledge and love of Christ, which allows us to put off sin, Ephesians 4. So that we may live Godly lives which reflect the redemption we have experienced in Christ, Ephesians 5. In order that we may stand firm and face the trials of this world with evangelistic passion because we have the peace of the gospel, Ephesians 6.

You see love does, but love also speaks. When we are captivated by the love of Christ we will seek to put off sin, we will seek to endure sinful cultures, we will identify and resist false teachings, but when we love Christ with a love incorruptible we speak the gospel of Christ in with zeal imperishable.

The reason Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, the reason we have gone through the book of Ephesians at GCF isn't simply that we may act like the church well in here, but that we may do what the church needs to do out there. Christ's church was bought by his love so that they may be sent out into the world sharing his love.

That is what this book is about. The doctrine of the church encourages us as we gather, instructs us in the gospel as we meet, but empowers us with the gospel as we are sent out.

Guys, in my sin I am terrified of next year. I'm terrified because I know the only way this group will grow is through the faithful evangelism of us. I know that the future of this group is tied to God's grace and our responsibility to evangelize and I think God has been preparing us this year for the reality of next year. We will need to speak the gospel out of a faith filled love if we are to engage this campus with the treasure of Jesus.

This scares me, because I am not the best evangelist, but I know the love I have for Christ has enabled me to be a faithful evangelist. And if we are motivated by the love we have for Christ, nothing can stop our message.

Doctrine on its own will not carry us to evangelism, but love for Christ will. Community on its own will not compel us to share the gospel with our roommates, but love for Christ will. Raw emotion on its own will not lead us to forsake our comfort, our reputation, or our comfort for the growth of Christ's church, but love for Christ will.

This summer, stay plugged into a church, be encouraged in your doctrine, but more importantly let the church and doctrine fan your love for Christ. That's what they are designed to do, and when done rightly that is what they will do.

This summer, learn to love Jesus with a love incorruptible, because we have much work to do and the only hope and sustainability we have comes for a faith-filled love of Christ.