

## Recall & React – In Conclusion: Ephesians 6:21-24

4-19-20

One of the things I love about a good courtroom drama movie is the scene of the closing argument. The defense and prosecution lawyers try to make a final pitch to the jury by summarizing the evidence and making their final case. Depending on the case there could have been hours and hours worth of testimony and evidence presented but everything comes down to the few minutes of the closing argument.

The closing argument is a time to try to pull everything together and focus on what has been most significant and most important during the trial. Conclusions matter in court cases and in other areas of life as well including letters. I'm not saying Paul is making a closing argument like a lawyer when he finishes his letters, but we typically don't pay attention to these final few words and we need to.

Paul tends to conclude his letters by focusing on core concerns and Ephesians is no exception. This focus on core concerns can be particularly helpful for us. It keeps us targeted in on the main things and helps us ward off distractions that so quickly grab our attention. So, what are the main things Paul finishes his letter with?

In Ephesians 6:21-24 Paul ends the letter with **2 Core Ministry Concerns for Christians**. And we're going to conclude our study of Ephesians with these today.

### **1. Personal Relationships (vv. 21-22)**

We tend to skip the sections of Paul's letters where he talks about specific people, probably because we don't know the names and these sections are near the end. But these are included on purpose and they tell us much about Paul's concerns in ministry. We need to be reminded of the vital significance of people and personal relationships in the life of the church.

Look at verse 21. Paul surrounded himself with people he could invest in for ministry. Here we meet one of these people. Look how Paul describes him. He is a faithful brother and minister. Tychicus shows up several other times in the NT and he's always faithfully fulfilling his ministry for the Lord. In Acts 20:4 he accompanies Paul on his journey. He's mentioned in 2 Timothy and Titus as one

who is with Paul but is sent to check in on churches and bring information from Paul. Notice what Paul says about Tychicus at the end of verse 21.

This man, Tychicus, would have carried this letter from Paul in Rome to Ephesus and the Ephesian church. There wouldn't have been a mail system available to the average person during this day and so Tychicus would have traveled the over 800 miles to deliver this letter. He would have given them the letter and then, in verse 22, Paul gives them the two main reasons for his coming. Look there.

First, Paul wants the church at Ephesus to know how he is. He cares for them and knows they care for him and so once in verse 21 and once in verse 22 he wants to communicate knowledge of his circumstances. But there's a second reason for Tychicus to come to them. Look at the end of verse 22.

Paul wants them to know about him, but he also wants the Ephesian church to be encouraged. Now, we need to focus in on this purpose for Tychicus in ministry. We will miss this if we skip over these final verses of Ephesians, but this isn't the only time in the NT that we find out "encouragement" is a major focus of ministry. I want to make a statement to you and then prove it to you from the NT.

**Biblical Christian service depends on actively and intentionally encouraging one another.**

Let me say it negatively. You are not engaging in true Christian service and ministry if you are not intentionally encouraging other believers. The word translated "encourage" here saturates the NT. It's translated all sorts of different ways but there are several key ideas. It means to comfort, to exhort, to appeal and to request. To encourage is to urge someone along, to strengthen them for the task at hand. It's to affirm what is good in them so they can continue to display that which is good. In many ways you can summarize our personal ministry to one another with this word "encourage". Let me show you how deeply rooted encouragement was in NT ministry.

Listen to Acts 14:21-22. Acts 15:30-32. Acts 16:40. Acts 20:1. In the space of just a few chapters in Acts we see that a primary goal for Paul and other Christians was to build up, encourage, affirm, and strengthen other believers. Football players run and tackle, doctors heal people, teachers give instruction and Christians encourage other Christians. Listen again to 1 Thess. 2:11-12 and 1 Thess. 5:11.

Now, if we are honest with ourselves this morning, we need to grow in this area. I don't think most Christians are trying to intentionally be discouraging to one another, but we just don't think to be actively encouraging to others. One author said it this way, *"Alert affirmation requires vigilance."* – Sam Crabtree. It's like when your child or grandchild is trying to learn to walk. You love that kid and so you are focused on the positive gains made. You are alert to affirm. You are sitting on the edge of your seat ready to explode with excitement when that first step is made. That's how I think Paul and others viewed Christian ministry. They sat on the edge of their seat, ready to give exhortation, encouragement, and comfort.

This means we are watchful for ways people are demonstrating Christ-like character and then we actually open our mouths and speak words of affirmation and encouragement. We aren't talking about trying to build up someone's self-esteem with cliché's and platitudes. We are talking about watchful care and concern for ways those around us are growing and changing.

What would Woodhaven Bible Church be like if we became people who are defined by encouragement? Two things. First, we will help one another persevere and grow through continual encouragement. You want that person near you to stop pursuing sin and start to grow? Urge, exhort, and encourage ANY signs of Christlikeness you see in them.

*"Affirmation energizes people. It not only lifts their spirits but motivates them to action. Affirmation not only points toward character already being demonstrated, but it fosters more of the same."* – Sam Crabtree

But second, when you begin to actively look for demonstrations of grace in others, it will change you. Your demeanor will change when you stop thinking only about yourself and turn your attention to the good God is doing in others.

So, what do we look for? It may be something as simple as a kind act of service. It may be someone using their God-given ability for God's honor and praise. It may be putting forward the effort to grow in Christ-likeness. It may be hard work, genuine care for family, courage, wise decision making, the fruit of the Spirit.

Here's the bottom line question for each of us to ask. Do I believe God is at work in those around me? Is He, by the Holy Spirit, growing His people? Then why don't I see it? Probably because I'm not looking. Most of us are walking through the

Detroit Institute of Arts with blindfolds on and complaining that the art isn't any good. Take the blindfold off, look, and affirm the work God is doing in others. That is exactly what Paul wanted Tychicus to do when he got to Ephesus.

So, Paul's first core ministry is concern is personal relationships. The second core concern for ministry is found in verses 23-24.

## **2. Positional Realities (vv. 23-24)**

We have spent so much time in our study of the book of Ephesians telling you about these positional realities. Keep in mind the very structure of the book and the title of our series. Recall and React. In chapters 1-3 Paul calls us to remember what God has done for us in Christ. We have benefits that flow from our union with Christ. Listen again to Ephesians 1:3. Then he goes on to enumerate those blessings and benefits.

The entire argument of the book tells us that when we recall our benefits we will react with a particular pattern of daily life. Our walk will be different. Listen again to Ephesians 4:1.

In these last two verses Paul wants to remind us of 3 positional realities. These are benefits we have because of our Union with Christ. It's quite normal for Paul to do something like this in the closing of his letters. We won't do this right now, but if you go back and examine the beginning and ending of each of Paul's 13 letters in the NT you will find the words grace and peace used over and over again.

When Paul closes a letter by wishing grace and peace on believers, he's not asking that God would bestow grace and peace for the very first time. He knows that those who are "in Christ" have received grace and peace. But he closes by praying for these positional benefits because he wants Christians to grow in their experience of these benefits. He wants you and I to know deeper and deeper the grace of God and peace of God.

Let's look specifically at what he says. Verse 23. Here he mentions two positional realities. First, peace to the brothers and sisters. Peace has been a dominant theme in the book of Ephesians. In Eph. 2:14 Jesus is our peace. In 2:15 He makes peace between Jews and Gentiles, who were formerly hostile, and forms them into one new man in Him. In 2:17 Jesus preaches peace to those who are near and

far. In 4:3 Paul says that we demonstrate our new walk in Christ by pursuing the unity of peace. And in 6:15 Paul calls it the gospel of peace. It's the gospel that proclaims peace with God and brings peace to our relationships with one another.

So, there's no doubt that we have objectively received peace with God, and we have been joined in peace to other believers. But this objective peace longs to be experienced in the daily life of the church.

The second positional reality in verse 23 is love with faith. Our love for God is accompanied by faith, it goes with faith. You'll notice that both peace and love are gifts from God. Look at the rest of verse 23. They flow from God to us and Paul's core concern in ministry is that we would experience peace and love in deeper and richer ways.

The final positional reality that Paul focuses on is found in verse 24 and its grace. You can see that in verse 23 love comes from God and here Paul prays that grace would come to those who love God unceasingly. Love sprouts naturally in the heart of the one who has experienced grace because love is a gift of grace. Paul longs for believers to be swallowed into a deeper experience of grace and love. Their love grows and they are more and more aware of God's grace. Love opens your eyes to grace and grace produces more love. They work in tandem in the life of the believer and Paul wants the team of grace and love to saturate us day in and day out.

Paul is both reminding us that our love for Christ will continue beyond death and exhorting us to persevere in our love for Christ. We have been assured throughout this letter of the grace of God demonstrated for us in Christ. He has loved us with an everlasting love and the believer's response to that grace and love is to continue to grow in love for Christ.

This is a fitting way to end the letter. We are confident in the grace and love of God for us. Paul has spent the letter, particularly the first part, assuring us of God's love and grace for us. This is a benediction prayed that we would continue to experience that grace. That our awareness of God's love would grow. It's similar to the prayer of 3:17-19. We know God's love, but we explore the depths and height of it.

And this is Paul's closing argument. He takes us back to these core concerns. People and positional realities. I would love for these two core concerns to dominate the ministry here at WBC. How often do we get worked up and concerned about things that don't fall into either of these categories? How much time and effort do we spend on other things when our primary focus should be seeing people encouraged and grown to be like Christ through the grace they have received from Christ? Will you pray with me that God will simplify our ministry focus in the coming months and that we will emerge from this time of separation focused on what truly matters? Let's pray.

## Sermon Reflection Questions

4/19/20

- What sort of distractions in church life keep us from being focused on the main things?
- What are the two reasons that Paul sent Tychicus to the church at Ephesus? (v. 22)
- What does Paul mean by the word “encourage” in verse 22?
- Do you agree with this statement made by Pastor Nathan? “Biblical Christian service depends on actively and intentionally encouraging one another.”
- Would others think of you as an encourager? What are some reasons you may struggle with this?
- How do you think the “culture” at WBC would change if everyone became intentional about being an encouragement to others?
- How does it change you when you are alert to encourage others?
- What does the second core concern, “positional realities”, mean?
- What are the positional realities that he mentions in verses 23-24?

- Do believers already have peace, love, and grace? If so, then why does Paul mention them in verses 23-24?