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## THE CARING CHURCH

Ephesians 6:21-24

By

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November 30, 2008  
Ephesians Lesson 63

The Caring Church  
Ephesians 6:21-24

An 11-year-old girl and her 8-year-old brother bickered and fought over the slightest thing. Their father was surprised when the girl made an artistic card for her brother's birthday. Inside she wrote, "Happy birthday to my nine-year-old brother. I am so glad to have a brother to love. So God gave me you. P.S. Don't read this out loud or I will twist your head off." (Adapted from *Reader's Digest* [Jan., 1999], p. 78.)

Perhaps you've felt that way at times about some of your brothers and sisters in the Lord. But we're family, so through all the irritations and misunderstandings, we should care deeply for one another and it should show to the watching world. A Greek writer named Lucian, who lived from about A.D. 120-200, said of the early Christians, "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator [Jesus] has put it into their heads that they are all brethren." (Cited by Irving L. Jensen, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* [Moody Press], p. 52.)

Up to this point, Ephesians has not been a very personal letter. Perhaps this was because Paul intended for it to be circulated among several of the churches in Asia Minor. But now, this brief conclusion oozes with his evident care for these Christians. It's all the more pronounced when you stop and think about Paul's circumstances. He was in prison in Rome, chained to a guard. He was getting up in years and his health was probably not great. From Philippians, written during the same imprisonment, we learn that fellow Christians in Rome were attacking Paul. We would understand if Paul sent out an appeal for prayer for his own needs.

But instead, these verses do not contain a hint about his difficulties. As we saw last time, the apostle's only prayer request was that he would be bold in proclaiming the gospel. When it comes to saying farewell, Paul's focus is his concern for these Christians and their needs. Paul knew that they were concerned about him and his imprisonment (see 3:13). So he sent Tychicus to tell them about his

situation and to comfort their hearts (6:21-22). Then Paul concludes with a benediction, which is really a prayer, reflecting again his love and care for these brothers and sisters in Christ. These verses teach us that...

Caring, godly relationships among believers are at the heart of God's purpose for the church.

Part of caring is keeping each other informed about how we're doing. So, twice (6:21, 22) Paul repeats that Tychicus will let the Ephesians know how he and those with him are doing. Of course, sending Tychicus meant that Paul would be deprived of this dear brother's presence. His words about Tychicus show how much he appreciated this dear man of God. Both the words about Tychicus (6:21-22) and Paul's benediction (6:23-24) show us how to be caring, godly brothers and sisters in Christ.

1. Tychicus shows us how to be caring, godly brothers and sisters in Christ (6:21-22).

Tychicus, whose name means "Lucky," was a trustworthy servant of the Lord from Asia Minor. Along with some other men, he accompanied Paul on part of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). He was one of the men who helped take the collection to Jerusalem. He went to the trouble of going to Rome to be with Paul in his first imprisonment. Now Paul is sending him back to Asia with the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. He also escorted the runaway slave, Onesimus, who had now become a Christian, back to his owner, Philemon. Tychicus was responsible to intervene before Philemon so that he would welcome Onesimus back as a brother, rather than punishing him as the law would have dictated. Later, Paul sent either Tychicus or Artemas to relieve Titus on the island of Crete (Titus 3:12). Tychicus was again with Paul in his second imprisonment. Paul sent him to Ephesus, freeing Timothy to try to get to the apostle's side before he was executed (2 Tim. 4:9, 12). Here, we learn four things:

- A. Be a beloved brother or sister.

Paul's words here are almost identical with Colossians 4:7-8. In both places, Paul refers to Tychicus as a beloved brother. He could have called him just a "brother," but he adds this word, *beloved*. It shows that Tychicus was a warmly relational man. He

wasn't cold and aloof. He wasn't brusque and insensitive. He wasn't grumpy and difficult to be around. He was *beloved*. When Paul used that word to describe Tychicus, everyone who knew him would have nodded and thought, "Yes, he is a dear, loving man. We love him dearly ourselves!"

Would people describe you as the *beloved* brother, or the *beloved* sister? If you say, "Well, not very many people in the church even know me," it probably says more about you than it says about the church. Are you outgoing and friendly? Do you go out of your way to meet new people and make them feel welcome? Do you take a genuine interest in others? Tychicus was that kind of man. That's why when Paul called him, "the *beloved* brother," everyone would have nodded in agreement.

B. Be a faithful brother or sister.

Paul calls him a *faithful* minister in the Lord (also in Col. 4:7). It means that he was trustworthy. He kept his word. He did what he was assigned with integrity. Paul could entrust him with the weighty responsibility for the churches in Crete or in Ephesus and know that he would be responsible. In a day when it would have been easy to mishandle the large gift for the Jerusalem saints, Tychicus could be trusted to deliver it all without pocketing some of it for himself. He could be trusted to deliver safely the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. He didn't know that they would become a part of Scripture, but we have them in our New Testaments today because Tychicus was a faithful man.

Faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit that should mark every believer (Gal. 5:22), but it seems all too often that is lacking among Christians. It means that if you take on a responsibility, a leader does not need to prod you or check on you repeatedly to see if it got done. You do it as unto the Lord and report back to those who assigned it to let them know that it's done. Faithfulness is a crucial part of caring relationships, because it means that if you say you'll do something for someone, you do it. They can count on you.

C. Be a serving brother or sister.

I don't know why, but the New American Standard Bible translates the same Greek phrase as "*faithful servant*" in Colossians 4:7 and "*faithful minister*" here. As you know, there is no such thing

as a clergy-laity distinction in the New Testament. Every Christian is a minister or servant of Christ (Eph. 4:12). Some are supported to do it full time, whereas others work (as Paul did) to support themselves. But whether he worked or was supported by the churches, Tychicus was a faithful “*servant in the Lord*” (Eph. 6:21). In Colossians 4:7, Paul adds that he was a “fellow bond-slave.” Tychicus realized that he did not belong to himself. Jesus Christ had purchased him with His blood. So Tychicus lived to serve Christ.

At the Judgment, the words that you want to hear from Jesus Christ are (Matt. 25:21), “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” To hear those words *then*, you must be faithfully serving Him *now*.

Are you? Do you faithfully serve Jesus Christ every day? Do you live to do His will? Do you look for needs in His church and get busy doing what you can do to meet those needs?

There are two types of people who walk in the door of the church. One type thinks, “Here I am, church! Meet my needs!” These folks often leave the church disappointed, because the church just didn’t meet their needs. The other type walks in, looks around, and asks, “Where are the needs that I can meet?” These are the Lord’s servants. They’re not here to be served, but to serve Christ by serving His church. They care about others.

D. Be an encouraging brother or sister.

Again, for some unknown reason the NASB translates the same Greek phrase differently. In Ephesians 6:22, Paul says that he is sending Tychicus so that “he may comfort your hearts.” In Colossians 4:8, it is, “that he may encourage your hearts.” It is the Greek word, *parakaleo*, which means to come alongside to help. Paul knew that the Ephesians were prone to lose heart over his trials (Eph. 3:13). If Tychicus had been a gloomy, negative sort of guy, he would have told the Ephesians about how dismal Paul’s circumstances were. But he wasn’t that sort of man. Paul knew that Tychicus would convey to the church Paul’s spirit of trust in the Lord, even in the midst of his difficulties. This cheerful report would encourage them.

What a ministry there is for a person who learns to be an encourager! This doesn't mean that you put on rose colored glasses and deny the reality of problems. Nor does it mean that you never acknowledge and confront wrongs. Rather, it means that you get people to see things from God's perspective, which always brings hope and encouragement. No doubt, Tychicus would have conveyed Paul's perspective that we read in Philippians: "Sure, Paul is in prison and his living situation isn't exactly plush. But you wouldn't believe the ministry that God has given Paul with the soldiers. Every time they change the guard, Paul gets a new opportunity to tell about Christ. Now there are believers all through the praetorian guard and even in Caesar's household!" That was God's perspective, and it would have brought encouragement and hope.

So let's learn from this beloved, faithful, serving, and encouraging brother how to be caring, godly brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. Paul shows us how to be caring, godly brothers and sisters in Christ (6:23-24).

We're probably tempted to skim over these benedictions without much thought, but there is a lot of solid theology here. This benediction varies from Paul's usual form, which suggests that it was not just a throwaway close to this letter. Paul wanted his readers to think about it. Usually, Paul's closing words are in the second person ("you"); but this is in the third person. Usually, the close is a single part; but here it consists of two parts. Usually, *grace* comes first; but here *peace*, which is usually last, is first (T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* [T. & T. Clark], p. 190).

A. Skevington Wood writes (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], pp. 91-92), "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." Four key words in Paul's benediction have played a key role in the message of Ephesians. They are more than Paul's wish; they are also his prayer, and therefore should be our prayer:

A. Pray for peace for the brethren.

One of the main thrusts in Ephesians is that through the cross of Jesus Christ, we have peace with God and peace with those from whom we formerly were alienated (2:11-22). We have peace with God because the blood of Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, which God's perfect justice demands. Drawing near to God is not a matter of being religious. The Jews had been as religious as anyone could be, but their religion was not good enough to reconcile them to God. Also, the good news is that being a sinful pagan who has never darkened the door of a church does not mean that there is no hope for you ever to be reconciled to God. Rather, as Paul has shown, the blood of Christ has made it possible for both non-religious pagans and religious Jews to draw near to God through faith in Jesus.

But this peace with God through the cross of Christ also reconciles groups that formerly were alienated from one another. As Paul wrote (Eph. 2:14), "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." For Paul, a large part of the glory of the church is that it contained "no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

This means that a racist church is not compatible with the New Testament church! If you have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord, every other person who has trusted in Christ is your brother or your sister. Our church should reflect the racial makeup of our community. As various races live in visible peace with one another in the church, it is a testimony to the world of Christ's saving grace.

B. Pray for love for the brethren.

Peace and love go hand in hand (Eph. 4:1-3). God's love for us is the example for our love for one another (5:1-2). Our homes should radiate the self-sacrificing love of Christ between husbands and wives, and parents and children (5:22-6:4). In the church, we must work at building and maintaining loving relationships between one another (4:31-5:2).

C. Pray for faith for the brethren.

Paul prays for "love with faith," as the two qualities are closely connected. In Galatians 5:6, Paul writes, "For in Christ Jesus nei-

ther circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." To paraphrase, "The outward keeping of religious rituals is not the main thing, but rather, faith that works itself out in deeds of love." Since Paul is praying this for the brethren, he is concerned here with the increase of faith and love among those who have already believed in Christ for eternal life. As Christians, we need greater faith in Jesus Christ that will move us toward self-sacrificing love for one another.

The source of this peace, love, and faith is "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul easily connects the Lord Jesus Christ with God the Father, thus demonstrating His deity and His equality with the Father. We should ask for one another and for ourselves, that God would increase our peace, love, and faith.

D. Pray for grace for all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption.

This is Paul's second benediction, that God's grace would be with these believers. They already have experienced something of the riches of God's grace, as Paul exulted in Ephesians 1:7-8a, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." Paul emphasized (2:5, 8) that salvation is by grace alone, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:7). In 3:2 & 8 and in 4:7 we saw that the only way we can serve Christ is because of His grace. But because God's grace is an inexhaustible storehouse, we need to pray for one another and ourselves that we would experience His grace more and more.

Note, also, how Paul describes believers (6:24): they "love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love." That last phrase is literally, "in incorruption." It may mean, "incorruptible love." Or, it may refer to the sphere in which our love for Christ takes place, namely, in the sphere of incorruptible or eternal life, which He has given to us. You are a genuine Christian if you know that God has given you eternal life in His Son and as a result, you love Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Experiencing His grace that saved you, although you should have been condemned, will increase your love for Jesus Christ.

## Summary and Review

The great theme of Ephesians is the eternal purpose of God, to sum up all things in Jesus Christ. The book falls into two halves. Chapters 1-3 reveal our exalted position with Christ in the heavenly places (2:4-6), all because God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (1:4). Chapters 4-6 show our experiential walk with Christ in this world (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), as we stand firm against the evil forces of darkness in the heavenly places (6:10-20). Our position in Christ and our walk in this world as we stand victoriously against these evil forces demonstrate God's eternal purpose, to sum up all things in Christ. At the heart of this practical walk is that we get along in unity in the church and in the home, which is the basic unit of the church.

By way of summary and review, here are four main practical lessons from Ephesians:

(1) The gospel is a life-transforming message.

Whether you are from a religious background, as the Jews in Ephesus were, or from a pagan background, as the Gentiles were, believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord drastically changed your life. As we saw, many of the people in Ephesus were heavily involved in the occult (Acts 19:18-19). Many had engaged in immorality with the temple prostitutes at the famous Temple of Artemis or Diana in Ephesus. But when they came to Christ, they burned their occult books and they abandoned their immorality (Eph. 5:3-12). God created them anew in righteousness and holiness of the truth (4:24).

Granted, this transformation works itself out gradually, as we lay aside the old life, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new life (4:22-24). But those who have been saved by grace embark on this new life of transformation in holiness.

(2) What you believe is extremely important.

Paul would not have spent the first three chapters of Ephesians laying the doctrinal foundation if doctrine were not crucial for your Christian life! *What* you believe determines *how* you live. If you claim to believe the gospel but live as the world lives, it proves that you really do *not* believe the gospel. We live in a day when professing evangelical Christians have belittled doctrine as irrelevant or

even as divisive. While truth necessarily divides, we should hold to the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). The doctrine of election, which Paul emphasizes in chapter 1, is divisive. But it's also vital for your understanding of the gospel and your growth in the Christian life. If it were not, Paul wouldn't have put it there.

(3) The church is extremely important to God.

Ephesians emphasizes the vital importance of the church. As Paul said (1:23), the church is Christ's body, "the fullness of Him who fills all in all." If Christ loved the church and gave Himself for the church as His bride (5:25-27), then we must love the church and give ourselves for her. True, she is not yet glorified, without spot or blemish. Yes, you will get wounded in the church. But, yes, you must commit yourself to that to which Christ is committed. You can't say, "I love Jesus, but I hate His bride." Or, "I love the Head, but His body stinks!" I recommend that you read Josh Harris' little book, *Stop Dating the Church* [Multnomah Press].

(4) Relationships in the church are extremely important to God.

This is the main thrust of Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:4-11, and 4:1-6:9. It's not a minor theme! Remember, in that culture, Jews and Gentiles were completely alienated from one another. But the church was to demonstrate the saving grace of God, who reconciled these two humanly incompatible groups into one new man. It is vital that we work through relational differences and show the world the love of Jesus Christ through our reconciled relationships.

Don't miss the fact that all of these truths are for those who are brethren (6:21, 23). You become a brother or sister through the new birth, when God's Spirit quickens you from spiritual death to spiritual life. So I close our studies in Ephesians by quoting again 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Above all, make sure you have been saved!

## Application Questions

1. What do you need to be doing *now* so that you will hear, “well done” from Jesus at the judgment?
2. How can a Christian discover where he should be serving? What guidelines does Scripture give?
3. Do we *really* need to work through relational difficulties in the church? Isn't it more practical just to avoid the other person? Discuss in light of Romans 12:18 & 14:19.
4. Why is commitment to the local church not optional for believers? How can someone who has been wounded by a church recover?

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