

Encourage one another, for Christ's sake (Ephesians 6:21–24)

Paul was writing this letter to the Ephesians from a Roman prison where he sat because of his ministry of God's grace to the Gentiles. He had a strong bond of friendship with the Ephesians and they were disheartened because of his circumstance (Eph 3:13). Paul's desire was build them up and encourage them. His commitment to that end is seen in the closing verses as well as his affirmation that they too are fully equipped to encourage one another and to follow Christ in every way.

I. *Committed to encourage* (6:21–22)

1. *Paul's concerns: to inform and to encourage*

- a. Paul wanted the Ephesian believers to know about his and his companions' circumstances. Paul's companions are reported in Colossians 4:10–14. Some they probably knew and would have been interested and concerned about their well-being in addition to Paul's.
- b. Paul wanted the Ephesian believers to be encouraged. Giving them information about himself and his companions was the means by which Paul sought to encourage them. Paul does not include that information in this letter, but from the letter to Philemon, sent at the same time, it appears that Paul was expecting release, and that even imprisonment had not stopped the advance of the gospel. (E.g., Onesimus had come to faith in Christ. Philippians 1:12 reports the same positive ministry.)

Follow Paul as he followed Christ by gathering as believers intentionally, striving to build one another up (cf. 1 Cor 14:12), by encouraging one another with reports of what God is doing in your own lives. This will require that you plan for gathering.

2. *Paul's solution: to send Tychicus to personally inform and encourage*

- a. Tychicus was from the Roman province of Asia (Acts 20:4) of which Ephesus was the capital and thus might have been personally known by the Ephesians (cf. 2 Tim 4:12). He was both beloved as a spiritual brother and one who faithfully served others because of his relationship to the Lord.
- b. Tychicus was to deliver letters (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon), escort Onesimus back to Philemon, inform the Ephesians about Paul and his companions, and thereby encourage them. His physical presence with them would allow a more thorough report. Paul yearned for his own reunion with believers (cf Phil 1:8; 2 Cor 1:15–16), but had to accept another solution.

It is right and good to yearn for physical presence. But when you can't, then take advantage of what you can do. As a church we care for the spiritual well-being of our people (Hebr 13:17) and for the testimony to the world (Phil 2:14–16).

II. *Equipped to encourage* (6:23–24)

Three qualities are available to equip every true believer to be the right encourager.

1. ***Peace***: peace with God is the foundation, peace between believers (Eph 2:15; 4:3) provides the opportunity, and inner peace (cf. Phil 4:6–7) produced by the Spirit frees and motivates. Strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:3), watching what you say, guarding against being judgmental, and praying with thanksgiving for your own peace.
2. ***Love with faith***: Love comes from faith and faith should accompany love. Both come from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and both had been evidenced in the Ephesians (1:15; 3:17–19). Love with faith drives the willingness to encourage each other and serve the Lord. Trusting in the sovereignty and goodness of God frees you to love as you should.
3. ***Grace***: God's grace is His willingness to do good toward believers even though they have not and can not merit it. The "unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8) are for those who love the Lord. That love is an essential part of believing in Him (1 Cor 16:22) and entails keeping His word and loving other believers (John 14:23; 1 John 4:20). God's grace is sufficient for all your needs, including all the present challenges. You as a believer in Jesus Christ have a greater reason for hope and strength and joy than anyone in the world around you.

All the imperatives of this letter rest in the truths presented about God's saving work. Paul's closing example of encouraging other believers is a simple way to show the difference made by faith in Christ. Let the "light afflictions" of this time period be a training ground in faithfulness to be ready for harder times and greater challenges to faithfulness. Take on the simple task of encouraging others for Christ's sake.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Why might believers hesitate to interact with others either in-person or on-line? How can we help improve that? What would help you if you hesitate to share about what God is doing in your life?
- What example could you cite that illustrates in our present circumstances the need for each of the qualities mentioned in closing (peace, love with faith, grace)?