

(Ephesians) the Benediction

by Jeff Noblit

Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for his boldness in preaching the gospel, emphasizing its importance as God's primary tool for winning the lost and glorifying himself.

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 4:8, 2 Corinthians 4:12, Ephesians 6:19-20, Ephesians 6:23-24

Topics: "Benediction"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power of gospel preaching to transform lives. He quotes Romans 10:14-15, where Paul explains the importance of hearing the message of Christ through a preacher. The preacher highlights that the preaching of the gospel is the backbone and major tool for winning souls and glorifying God. He urges the audience to pray for the preacher, as he acknowledges his dependence on the Holy Spirit to effectively communicate God's message. The sermon concludes with the reminder that living out the teachings of Christ is a form of evangelism that demonstrates the transformative power of the gospel to the world.

Transcript

We're coming to the end of Ephesians and we're in chapter 6, of course, the final chapter of Ephesians. And Paul gives what I'm calling tonight the benediction, the closing statements of his letter to the church at Ephesus. And my prayer is that somewhere down the road, I will get to re-preach this book and study it more deeply.

Some of y'all think, how in heaven's name could you do that? It's just that there's so much to learn. And when you come to a book like Ephesians and God just does so much, I just can't tell you, this has been the momentous study of my ministry without exception. I do know my Lord better because of Ephesians.

I do love my Lord more because of Ephesians. I do enjoy my Lord more because of Ephesians. And I hope that's true of you.

I don't know how you can dive in and go through the glories and the wonders of grace in chapters 1 and 2 and the marvelous applications of the last two chapters and not just say, God, you're just more awesome. You're more wonderful. You're more glorious than I ever, ever fathomed before.

Well, I might as well do it. The last message, book of Ephesians, verse 19. And pray on my behalf, Paul says, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the

mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, that in proclaiming it, I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.

But that you also may know about my circumstances, which is how I'm doing. Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose so that you may know about us and that he may comfort your hearts.

Peace be to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all of those who love our Lord Jesus with incorruptible love. Now, Paul in this benediction closes with a prayer request for himself and a prayer offered for the saints or the believers.

So those will be our two points. First of all, Paul says to the church at Ephesus, pray for my continued boldness in preaching the gospel. That's what he says.

Everything that he's done and all that he's mentioned and all the circumstance that he is in, he's literally in chains in a Roman prison. But what he asked prayer for is that he might continually be faithful to God's calling so that he might boldly preach the gospel. He doesn't just say it once, he says it twice.

He says it in verse 19, with boldness make known the mystery of the gospel. Then in verse 20 at the end, that I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. Now, this word boldness is a word that means the freedom without restraint on me.

In other words, to do it like it ought to be done, to preach it with straightforwardness, with confidence and with frankness. And I think to a significant degree among other things, without the fear of man. There's the ever present pressure and temptation for a God called preacher to become a pulpiteer rather than a preacher of the word.

And there's a great difference between the two. Pulpiterring is more an art form that amuses and entertains where preaching the word has no thought of entertainment or amusement, but forth telling God's truth for God's glory. And as someone said, we are to preach only for an audience of one and whoever else likes it, they can like it or not like it.

So Paul is, he winds things down and he's in this dreadful prison chained literally to a Roman guard. Doesn't say pray for my chains. He doesn't say pray for my health.

He doesn't say pray about my circumstance. And it would have been fine for him to ask that. And he may have at other times, but what he says here is pray that I'll be faithful and preach with boldness the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I begin to meditate on that. Why would Paul say twice, pray that I'll be bold, pray that I'll preach boldly. Why would he do that? And it's like the Holy Spirit started bringing to my mind things that Paul had said about ministry and about preaching that would tempt you or work against bold preaching.

So let me give you some of the reasons why Paul would ask the Ephesians to pray for his boldness and why you should pray for your pastor to preach the word with boldness or other pastors or any pastors you may know that they would preach faithfully and frankly with boldness. Number one, first of all, because Paul's already taught us that preaching the gospel is God's primary tool for winning the lost and glorifying himself. The preaching of the gospel is God's primary tool, not his only tool, but his primary tool for winning the lost and glorifying himself.

In Romans 1:16, the Bible says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek. So this is God's dynamite. That's an incredible statement.

The word power, *dunamis* is dynamite. God says gospel preaching is dynamite to change men and women, boys and girls, revolutionize their lives. Take them from the darkness of sin and lostness to the light of God and forgiveness.

It's powerful to give them a brand new direction in life. And what could be more important than that? Romans 10:14 and 15, Paul follows this up and says, how then shall they call upon him in whom they've not believed? And how should they believe in him in whom they've not heard? And how should they hear without a preacher? Certainly God saves folks through Bible studies. God saves folks through personal witnessing.

We must always encourage that. But primarily and foundationally, everything is connected to Bible preaching. That's just the way God's designed it.

And so Paul says, whatever else you do, whatever else is on your heart and mind Ephesians, as I close this letter, pray that I will keep my calling and preach boldly the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the way God glorifies himself. Look back to Ephesians chapter one, if you will.

And look at verse 12. He's talking about all the sovereign work of grace that brings us to Christ, that brings us to salvation. And in a summary statement in Ephesians 1:12, he says to the end that we, who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of his glory.

Why did God do all of that? Why did God do all the things that wrought about our salvation to the praise of his glory? So that he might be glorified and he might be exalted and he might be lifted up as the God who can do such a wonderful thing for all eternity. And in Ephesians 3:21, Ephesians 3:21, Paul simply says to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever, amen.

So how is God winning the lost and how is God glorifying himself? Well, the backbone, the major tool of it is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whatever else happens, that must stay strong. I believe soul winning depends upon that.

Lay Bible studies depend upon that. Every type of personal witnessing depend upon that. If that gets weak, everything else starts getting weak.

So Paul says, pray. It's God's primary tool for winning the lost and glorifying himself. Secondly, pray for him to have boldness in preaching the gospel because preaching the gospel is the most awesome of all callings.

The most awesome of all callings. I do not use the word awesome in the trite superficial way it's used in our culture. I mean, in inspiring awe and wonder.

It's such a magnanimous task. The stupendousness of it is overwhelming. It's an overwhelming task for a human being to be called to such a thing.

In verse 19, he says, pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me. The word utterance in the new American standard means the liberty of the spirit to express freely and clearly. Paul says, I can't depend on myself.

I don't have the wherewithal to preach this message as it ought to be preached. You must pray for me. And I'll say that to you.

You must pray for me that God, the Holy Spirit will give me utterance to express it freely and clearly. And then he says, in the opening of my mouth, the opening of the mouth has a solemnness to it. As if God opens his mouth and a very solemn and sobering truth from God comes forth.

So it's God's message and it's God's truth. And it is a fearful task. Dr. John MacArthur preached at the Southern Seminary, our flagship seminary of Southern Baptist in Louisville, Kentucky while back.

And he told those preachers that if he didn't believe in the doctrine of election, he would quit. Because he says the awesomeness and the fearfulness of thinking that eternal souls depended only on me, I could not handle that. And I want to say that to you with all of my heart.

If you convince me biblically that God was not sovereignly in charge, I would leave the ministry. I could not sleep at night thinking that it was all in my hands. Thank God it's not all in the hands of fallen human men.

Do you think for one second the eternal souls of men depended upon only men? Yes, we have to be responsible. And yes, we have to share the gospel. And yes, we must urge all men.

But in the balance, God says he's sovereign and in control and we can rest in that. He talks about the mystery of the gospel. He says that I could make utterance to be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.

Now, mystery doesn't mean something that's hard to figure out. He just means something that is only now being fully revealed. The gospel was contained in the Old Testament.

It's explained in the New Testament. It was to some degree concealed in the Old Testament. It's revealed in the New Testament.

So he says, we've got the full revelation now that God is gonna save for himself a people through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus. And he's gonna save those people out of the Jews and of all things to Jewish man out of Gentiles. God has one people that he will save through the cross of his son.

And they come from all the peoples of the world. That was the mystery. And that to you and I, that's just sort of, well, big deal.

We've never really thought anything about all these class differences or these nationality differences. But boy, in this day that Paul preached, it was a great thing to think that God might have for himself a people outside the nation of Israel. Second Corinthians chapter two show us something of the awesomeness of this calling.

In verses 15 through 17, Paul says, for we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. He said, those who are gods and are being saved, they think one thing about us. Those who are perishing and are unbelievers, they think something else about us gospel preachers.

Notice how he says it in verse 16, to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. He said to one group, it hardens them and seals their doom. It's just I'm the aroma of death to them.

To the other group, their hearts are melted. The word of God like a hammer crushes their hardened hearts. They melted before the Lord.

They receive Christ as Lord and savior. And my message is the aroma of life to them. Then he says, who's adequate for this? What human being can comprehend the awesomeness of that task? The word adequate just means who's able, who's sufficient, who's competent or who's fit or who's worthy of such a calling.

None of us are. Well, we are preachers who are called to preach and we are fallen yet saved men with finite minds and finite tongues. We blunder, we fail, we sin, we all sin.

And we need prayer to be used of God. It's such an awesome task. The elders have moved our prayer time to Sunday morning.

And one of the reasons we moved it to Sunday morning was I wanted 20 to 30 minutes of those men praying with me for the preaching of the word on Sunday. It's just such an awesome task. Well, Paul said, pray that I'll have boldness to preach the gospel.

First of all, because it's God's chief tool, primary tool for winning the lost and glorifying himself. Secondly, he said preaching the gospel, we ought to pray for my boldness because it's the most awesome of all callings. Thirdly, pray for my boldness in preaching the gospel because persecutions and sufferings accompany gospel preaching.

Persecutions and sufferings will always accompany gospel preaching. Now, thank God they're good seasons and bad seasons. There are times when it's not so bad and times when it's worse.

But here Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus and he calls himself an ambassador in chains. Literally, he was in chains being persecuted and therefore suffering for the gospel that he preached. Here's another thing that he said to the church at Corinth along this line, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, beginning in verse 23.

He's comparing himself with the false teachers who've crept into the church at Corinth and tried to undermine his leadership and pull the disciples away. And he says this, are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane. In other words, I shouldn't have to humanly prove to you this, but I'm going to because that's what you seem to be enamored with is the human show that these false teachers give you.

Well, he says, I'm more so in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods.

Once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked a night and a day. I have spent in the deep. I've been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea.

And this is the one I think hits preachers today more than anything, dangers among false brethren. Those who call themselves Christians, but make it their full-time job to assassinate the character of God's preachers. I've been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst, often without food in cold and exposure.

And apart from such external things, like that's just one part of it, Paul says, there's the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches, plural. Now that's overwhelming to me. One church to me is plenty.

Paul said, I've got many churches I'm concerned about their welfare. Then he says, who's weak without my being weak? Who's led into sin without my intense concern? So Paul says, you know what? That fifth time they beat me with 39 lashes, I struggled with the temptation to soften the gospel. I struggled with the temptation to give the Judaizers who want a little legalism in the gospel, maybe temper with the gospel a little bit to appease them.

So maybe they won't turn me over to the whips anymore. And then when I went to the Gentiles and the Romans who would like a little lasciviousness and liberality put on the gospel, I've been tempted to tamper with the gospel a little bit and make it more of an easy believism and a sin condoning gospel so that they would not persecute me. But he said, I'm not going to do that.

You guys pray. I'll keep boldly preaching the gospel, even though there's persecutions and sufferings that accompany gospel preaching. John expressed some of the kind of suffering and attack you get in 1 John 1, 10.

John says, for this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds. Now, this is a guy who's risen up in the church to oppose John. He said, I'll call attention to his deeds, which he does unjustly accusing us with wicked words and not satisfied with this.

Neither does he himself receive the brethren and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. So John, like Paul, suffered continuous verbal abuse for his preaching of the word of God. And then one other one I want you to look at.

Keep your finger in Ephesians 6 and turn back to 2 Corinthians 4. Would you do that? 2 Corinthians 4. Now, these are the things that Paul had experienced or was experiencing in his life. And let us know, no wonder he asked them twice, pray that I'll keep on preaching boldly and won't fall away the temptation. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 8. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.

Always a caring about in the body, the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in my body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. Now look at verse 12.

So death works in us, but life in you. Here's what Paul is saying. He's saying, these kinds of persecutions and sufferings are like the preacher of the word just dying daily.

You got to die to your happiness at times. You got to die to your health at times. I've never experienced anything like this.

Lashings and beatings and run out of cities and running for your life. I've never experienced anything like that, but all gospel preachers will experience persecutions and sufferings. And he's saying in my dying, if I'm faithful, it will bring that persecution which puts dying on me.

But if I'm faithful, that message will bring life to you. Eternal life, new life in Jesus Christ. That's a powerful thing there.

We have a lot of young preacher boys in our church. We have children here that I know God's going to call into the ministry and many call into the mission field and moms and dads and grandmothers and granddaddies, let's pray for them because they are entering a life of dying so that others might know the life of God. That's the trade out.

But I want to say something to you. God's grace is sufficient. Always has been, always will be.

Well, number four, a fourth reason why Paul says, pray twice now, pray that I'll be bold, pray that I'll have boldness and faithfulness in preaching this gospel is because outward success is sometimes hard to find. And all of us would like more outward success. Well, I pastor a church that has seen incredible outward success and significant outward decline.

And boy, that's tough sometimes to say, what do we do? Or what do we change? And often God says, you can't change anything. You have to be faithful and bold and doing what I've called you to do. Jesus experienced this.

Jesus went to Nazareth. The people at Nazareth are the people of Jesus' hometown. They knew his mom.

They knew his dad. They knew his half brothers. They knew they were a carpenter family.

They saw the boy Jesus working as a carpenter helper for his father. They were just too familiar with him and being so familiar with him. It's just the kid from Nazareth.

They just couldn't respect him. Familiarity does breed contempt. You know what the scripture says in Mark chapter 13? It says, Jesus could do no or very few miracles there because of their unbelief.

He had very little success in Nazareth because they were just too comfortable with him. Just too familiar. And the outward success of his ministry in Nazareth was little or nothing.

If you'd gone to Nazareth and say, how's this following of Jesus doing here? That's about nothing, man. Nobody here is interested in it. He can't even draw much of a crowd here.

Paul on one occasion writes that, all have left me but one. I've got one associate left because everybody wants to be concerned about the things of the world and not the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had a season when he said outwardly, it's just not working.

Pray that I'll be bold. 2 Timothy chapter 4 verses 1 through 5. We've seen Jesus. We've seen Paul.

Now Paul's instruction to Timothy, his pastor under him. He says, I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and by his kingdom, preach the word. Be ready in season when it's convenient and out of season when it's not convenient.

Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. Now here's the verse, verse 3 that talks about outward success. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.

Now that's exciting, Paul. Thank you for calling me alongside. Thank you for giving me this ministry.

Thank you for passing the baton to me. Now you're telling me the time's coming when they're not going to want to listen to my preaching. That's exactly what he's telling Timothy.

The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. Have you ever meditated on that phrase endure? Did you know that's what you're supposed to do? Come in here on Sundays and endure my preaching. Now don't be a smart aleck and tell me after the service, I've been doing that pastor for many years now.

Well, what it means is that naturally there's going to be a lot of things about sound preaching that rubs you the wrong way, that bothers you, that makes you uncomfortable. And the word endure there is the same word that means to bear up under. It's used in another part of the New Testament where it says we're to be forgiving of each other and bearing up under one another's burden.

That is if Andy over here sins against me and I'm supposed to do what? I'm supposed to bear it and forgive him. I don't want to, I don't feel like it. I'm to bear up and I'm to endure it.

That's what this word here means. It means they're going to be... Now, listen, let me ask you something. Let me see where we are as a church.

Do we raise our children to learn the discipline of listening to sound preaching? The discipline of it. That's not the one I'm hearing today. What I'm hearing overwhelmingly today is find out what's most amusing.

Find out what's most entertaining. Find out what keeps your interest and God forbid a pastor be boring. But nevertheless, there's a calling on the laity to learn the discipline of listening to sound preaching because it's not what pleases the flesh.

There's an enduring element. And Paul tells Timothy, there's going to be a time when they won't endure that. There'll be seasons when the going thing will be to find people.

He says here, wanting to have their ears tickled are furnished with the latest fad, the most exciting new things. They will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside the myths. But you be sober in all things, endure hardship.

Wow, this just isn't a very exciting lifestyle, is it called to preach? You're not going to have outward success a lot of the times. They're not going to hear you. They're going to want you to trick them and tease them and amuse them and entertain them.

It's going to be a hardship. That's what you're called to do and do a hardship. Do the work of an evangelist and fulfill your ministry.

Well, no wonder Paul said pray twice, pray that I'll not back off. I'll be bold in faithfully proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, I think this is number five.

Another reason you need to pray this Paul would say is because false prophets and false gospels abound. False prophets and false gospels abound. Every account I've read in church history of a great move of God where God just came and revivals broke out and souls were being saved and lives were being changed.

There was a counterfeit movement that rose up alongside of it. People that just wanted to get in on it and manipulate it and use it for themselves, maybe material gain or whatever it would be. That's always been the case and it was certainly the case in Bible days when Paul and the apostles were ministering and it's certainly the case today.

They abound everywhere. Second Peter chapter two verse one says, but false prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you. Oh, certainly not us.

It's not what he said. There will also be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce rather destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Jude said, they're like hidden reefs in your love feast.

A hidden reef is just under the surface and you don't know it's there till your boat crashes into it and it tears everything up. In Acts chapter 20 verses 28 through 30, Paul, before he left the Ephesian elders said this. He told the pastors in Ephesus, be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And if that's not bad enough, look at verse 30. And from among your own selves, men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

Paul said, it's a tough go when you got savage wolves from the outside and men rising up from the inside, speaking perverse things, trying to lead people away from your church. So he says, pray for me that I'll keep preaching with boldness and not be distracted and not be tempted to alter God's message regardless of what's happening, even when false prophets and false gospels do abound. Well, the next one, our F on my outline, Paul says, pray that I'll stay bold with the gospel because Paul was mortal and he got discouraged.

He was human. And I do think discouragement is a sin. At least it's a sin if you let yourself stay there because God's in control and we can praise him and trust him no matter where we are, but we all have to fight through those things from time to time.

When Paul was with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2, verse three, he said, I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. Paul said, I was just down when I was there and I was not strong when I was there. And those are the times when you're discouraged and when you're weak, when you can start compromising if you're not careful.

Just doing what will get folks along and help things smooth over. Weakness, Paul said, fear and much trembling. In 2 Corinthians 4, verse eight, we looked at it earlier.

He said, we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not despairing. Paul said, pray for me.

I have my seasons and I need you to pray that I'll remain faithful. And notice he didn't say pray that he'll feel better. Let me say something to you, church.

God didn't very well use men who are confident and cocked full of themselves. God mightily uses weak vessels. And just because on the outside, if you looked at Paul's ministry, you saw this fearless, courageous warrior for God.

And he was. The Bible's so good to show us that on the inside, there was often weakness, fear, and trembling. I know some of that myself.

Sometimes in counseling, I'll share my own insecurities and my own fears and my own doubts. People look at me and say, I had a lady just there. They said, you? I said, absolutely.

What did Paul say? When I'm weak, then I'm what? Strong, strong. Matter of fact, if you pray for God to use me, God will make sure I stay weak in many ways so that I'll depend on him. Then the power of my ministry is God and not me.

And that's where we want it to be. I remember reading in Spurgeons, our little biography sketch of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, how he went through intense, deep depressions that he had just fight his way out of. And all the great men of God that I study had their weaknesses and their discouraging seasons.

And so did Paul. And so we need prayer that we'll remain faithful and boldly proclaim his gospel. And then the last one here, the reason why Paul would say to the church, at least the ones I've gleaned from the New Testament, to pray that he would boldly, faithfully preach the gospel, it's because God had called him and hadn't released him yet.

I love it. It's the point is this, God called me into this, God started this and I can't stop it. You see, you can't stop what you didn't start.

And I pray this often about my ministry here, God, if you've got something else for me, if I'm to go somewhere else, if I'm to do something else, if I'm not the man, just show me what you want me to do. But God hasn't released me. He hasn't shown me anywhere else to go.

Let me just reel off some of these. As Paul started his letters to the various churches, he made the point very clearly that God gave him this ministry. It wasn't of his own choosing.

In Romans 1, verse one, he says, Paul, a bond servant of Jesus Christ, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel. In other words, he's saying, God did all this. I'm God's apostle.

God set me apart to this role. I didn't choose it. First Corinthians 1, 1, Paul called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

Again, I didn't do this. God called me. It's his will.

Second Corinthians 1, 1, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. By who? By God's will. He's doing this.

Galatians chapter one, verse one, Paul, an apostle. Now he gets real clear, not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God, the father, who raised him from the dead. Now the Galatians were really being infiltrated with error.

And so Paul began the letter by saying, I want you to know something. I'm not another one of these scandalous scoundrels who come to you with man-tempered, man-oriented, weak watered down Bible preaching. I'm God's apostle preaching God's truth.

And God called me to do it. He said, I just want you to know that God called me to this. And he hadn't released me yet.

First Timothy 1, 1, as he begins his letter to Timothy, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, according to the commandment of God, our savior and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope. Well, at this point, God's called

me to this. He hadn't released me yet.

So I can't quit. So you pray, I'll be bold and be faithful till he gets through with me. In other words, Paul could not yet write, I fought the good fight.

I've kept the faith. I finished the course. Not yet.

That's coming, but he can't say it yet. So he says, I've got to be faithful. God's not through with me.

So let me ask you again. And we have another point. We'll be through.

But let me ask you again. Paul didn't say pray for my health. He didn't say pray for these bleeding open sores on my wrist, on these ankles where these iron bracelets have chafed and infected my skin.

He didn't say pray for my circumstances. He didn't say pray about my pain. Now he may have it other times.

And certainly that was fine. But what was on Paul's heart? One thing, pray, I will be faithful. What God's called me to do.

Boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, why did he say that? It's because he understood and he grasped and he trusted the truth of Matthew 6, 33. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, Jesus said.

And all these things shall be added unto you. And he knew in God's kingdom and in God's righteousness, his role was to faithfully preach as God's apostle. And he said, if I put that first, the chains, the pain, the health, the circumstances, the living environment, all that will be added unto me.

I don't have to worry about it if it's God's will. If I put first his kingdom. Well, first of all, Paul says, pray for me that I will continue with boldness proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then lastly, Paul prays for the believers. We see that at the end of chapter six. And notice what he says as he's closing this book down as we begin in verse 23.

First of all, he prays for peace among the believers. Peace among believers. I mean, why not? He'd already told them in Ephesus chapter two, verse 19, that we're all of the same household.

And I don't know about you, but it's good to have peace in the household. And he says, whether you're Jew or whether you're Gentile, you're all the same household. Now, once you're converted, you're one in Christ and you ought to work toward peace one among the other.

And Ephesians 4, 25, he said, we are members one of another. We are inseparable in a sense. There is a connectivity among us that should not and cannot be separated.

And as Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, blessed are the peacemakers that they might be shown to be the children of God. So Paul first prays for peace among believers. Then he prays for the believers to have love with faith.

Look at it there in verse 23. He says, peace be to the brethren and love with faith. Now these go together.

Romans 5, 5 says, and hope does not disappoint because the love of God, now notice this, has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit that's given to us. Love has its origin in God and God's poured it out in us. And so what Paul is saying is you are changed beings.

Christ has radically changed you. One of the changes is he's placed the love of God in you. Now let that flow out and be the spirit of your fellowship.

And then faith in Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, he shows us that faith is actually a grace gift of God. For by grace, you've been saved through faith. And all of that I'm amplifying here, all of that not of yourselves, it's the gift of God, not by works.

Lest any man should boast. God has radically changed you believers. And part of the transformation is God's love is in you.

And now listen, a new capacity to faith toward God, that is believe God is in you. So I challenge you to live out what you are. Loving beings with God's love and people who can walk trusting God in his word where others cannot do that.

But note all three of these, peace, love and faith all have their origin in God. And Paul is simply saying, your God changed people now live like you are. And I'm praying that you will.

Now he says peace, and then he says love and faith. And now thirdly, he says grace. Notice verse 24, grace be with all of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

Incorruptible love, that phrase incorruptible or the word incorruptible is the same word that you would use for the resurrected life. We are mortal beings, we're perishable beings rather, we're raised imperishable or this word incorruptible is the same Greek word. It's a word for the new life.

In other words, the new life of God is in you. And here's the neat thing about it. He says, grace be to all of those who love, what did he say? Jesus or God, love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

Now listen, here's what he's saying. You are those people who have a new heart capacity to love God. God's done something in you.

And when God did that in you, he changed your affections to now. Now listen, once you're converted, you have a new lifestyle of affections and love toward God. And if that's true in you, you're one of God's true regenerated ones.

Now that love for God may not be as strong at some times or as it is at others. You may not be growing as fast at times as other times, but once you're truly converted, God has placed in you a growing love for God. And listen, since he put it in you, it will never end.

Therefore it's incorruptible. It can't be thwarted. It can't be damaged.

It can't be removed. It's not going to die out, which leads to our bad disconviction of the perseverance of the saints. So this grace that he's talking about has put a love in us for God.

And we now love God with this incorruptible love because it's a love God gave us for himself. So you see, you can't even love God with your love. You have to love God with the love he gives you to love him.

Did you know that? I don't know about you, but that resonates with me. That, that, amen of the Holy Spirit comes up in me when I read that. Because I know that there is no way that Jeff Knoblet, who is 19 years of age, driving back to college as a college freshman would have just decided, hey, I'm going to start loving God.

And I'm going to do it tonight. No, God did something in that car. And he placed in me this never ending, incorruptible love for God.

And he said, those are the kind of people who have God's grace on their lives. So let's summarize what Paul has said in this. Number one, Paul said, pray for the preaching of the word because it is the backbone of the church's inward and outward or upward growth.

If we're going to grow deeper in the Lord, if we're going to grow in quantity and get larger numbers, the backbone of it is the preaching of the word of God. Now there's other ways to gain numbers, but if it's going to be God's growth, the backbone of it has to be the preaching of the word. So pray for the preaching of the word.

Secondly, pray for the church, that the church would grow in peace in faith and in love. Now think about that. That's evangelism too, because as we, and I'm going to tell you something as your pastor, we, if it kills every one of us, are going to learn to love and live together like the children of God.

We're going to learn how to do it. We're just going to learn how to do it. Can you say amen? We're going to learn that when we get our feelings hurt, we solve it biblically.

We're going to learn to love each other. We're going to learn to have peace with each other. We're going to learn to walk in that grace that God wants us to.

Now, why is that? Because now listen, if you can give me a group of believers that really does that, that will be a powerful gospel witness to our community. They'll say something's real there and it'll incite their appetite to know it. It's just Bible.

It's just 2000 year old Bible. But if we'll learn to walk in this, including your pastor, we all learn to walk in this, we may see our greatest years of evangelism we've ever seen. And by the way, we're not seeing bad years right now.

If you'd counsel with the people I've counseled with and compare it with what we used to see, God's doing a lot of good work right now, changing men and women, boys and girls hearts. But you see how both of them are evangelistic? Pray for the preaching of the word. That's God's evangelism.

Pray for the peace and the love and the grace in the church because when we walk that way, that'll show the world that our Lord's changed us. And that's evangelism. So that's the way Paul brings the conclusion to the book of Ephesians.

The preceding message comes from the expository preaching ministry of senior pastor teacher, Dr. Jeff Knoblett. For more information or other materials that are available, contact Anchored in Truth Ministries at www.anchoredintruth.org or call us toll free at 1-800-565-PRAY.

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