

Ephesians God's New Community
More like Paul, more like Jesus!
Ephesians 6:21-24
3rd April 2022
Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

A Christian is a Learner

Earlier this week, Yvonne, my wife, asked me what I would be preaching, out of the last four verses of Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians. Could a sermon come out of these few ordinary verses?

"Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant of the Lord, will tell you everything so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for that very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

On the surface these sentences seem lowly and mundane: the apostle Paul merely signing off his letter! This very week I read chapter 3 of Tom Holland's book, "Dominion—the making of the Western Mind," where I found these words: *"Paul's letters—the correspondence of a vagrant, without position or reputation in the affairs of the world are the most influential, the most transformative, the most revolutionary ever written"* (page 78)

As far as I am aware Holland is not a Christian, but he can see that the letters Paul wrote have had more impact on the world than any other letters written by anyone, anywhere. And the reason for that, of course, is because these letters were inspired by God the Holy Spirit. These four verses may seem ordinary and prosaic but they are filled with powerful, wonderful and gracious wisdom. But we need a detour to understand these verses. The most common word used to describe Christian is the word, "Disciple" (used 294 times, in comparison with "Christian" which is only used 7 times). Disciple means learner, someone who learn from Jesus Christ, who follows him. How does a young Christian become more like Jesus, since Jesus is in heaven? Well believers grows to become like Jesus is through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit they are just automatically "transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). It's just happening by God's power! But the other way this young Christian grows is by being around older Christians and copying them, learning from them. Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."* In other words, says Paul, "If you want to know what it means in practice to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple, look at me, I am a living example! I am following Jesus, so if you follow me, you too will be following Jesus."

We become better followers of Jesus by watching and copying older Christians. Hasn't this happened to you? You've been in a home group or chatting to a fellow Christian and something they have said or done has really impressed you or inspired you and you've said to yourself "I want to be more like that, perhaps more loving, more forgiving, kinder, more servant hearted, or whatever. We all learn to be like Christ by learning from older Christians.

Some immediate applications

Before we return to Ephesians 6, we should pause. Young Christians— you will grow in likeness to Jesus by looking to the godly examples around you and by copying their example. That is why we place home groups at such a high level of priority at MPC. In a home group you can see—at close range—what it means in practice to follow Jesus Christ. We want you to grow in Christ! All Christians—that is how you grow too, make sure, therefore, that you choose godly examples to follow. And remember that young believers are watching you, looking up to you, copying you. How careful we older Christians must be to set a godly example to the babies among us!

And now to end our detour, and to what we are being taught through the last four verses of Ephesians. Well Paul is setting before us a high example to follow. Paul is way above all of us, and we're to learn from him what it means to be a follower of Jesus, first how to honour Gospel workers.

1. Let's grow in our honour of Gospel Workers

Look at the honourable way Paul refers to Tychicus, "the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord." In those days there was no postal service, so the letter of Ephesians had to be carried by hand over land and sea. Paul always had a little Gospel team around him and he would choose one of these to be his courier. Paul couldn't deliver the letter because he was in prison, so he chose faithful Tychicus to undertake the task. If Tychicus went by sea, the journey from Rome to Ephesus would have been around 1000 miles and would have taken at least 10 days; and let's not forget that every sea journey in those days was risky. From what we read in the NT, these are the kinds of practical tasks Tychicus did—he was Paul's trusty "odd-job" man. Look at how Paul names and honours Tychicus: He calls him dear brother, and a faithful servant in the Lord. Let us honour those who serve the Lord faithfully in his kingdom. Missionaries, evangelists, pastors, church workers, elders, deacons, paid and unpaid? In our day there are at least two factors that could work against us honouring the Lord's servants: (i) Scandals among politicians out there in the world can easily tarnish our view of **all** who serve us, whether in state or church, and (ii) there have been a recent spate of "Celebrity Christian leaders"

who have fallen from grace, Ravi Zacharias, Bill Hybels and only a week or so ago, Hillsong's Brian Houston. These men have brought the name of Christ into disrepute. But we must be very careful not to allow these *fallen few* to tar the brush of the *faithful many*. There are an untold number of servants of Jesus Christ who deserve our honour and respect.

Here at MPC we have 14 worthy deacons and 5 worthy elders, and 2 worthy part-time workers, Russ and Nathan, and a large number of missionaries and Gospel workers we support: let us hold them in the highest regard. "Tychicus: dear brother and faithful servant."

What else do we learn from Paul's example?

2. Let's grow in the openness of our lives

"Tychicus.. will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are." Paul lived an open life before his Christians friends. He told them about his hardships and disappointments: *"Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm"* (2 Timothy 4:4), and he told them about his joys: *"Because of my chains most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."* (Philippians 1:14)

Before we were converted, we lived in the dark because we didn't want our sins exposed but now we are walking in the light we need to take the lid off and "let our lights so shine that others will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven."

Do you live an open life? I guess, in today's terms that means opening our homes, if we can. I remember visiting a married couple many years ago. Beside the settee was a copy of The Sun Newspaper in the days when the paper published a topless model on page 3. The husband noticed that I had noticed and he was embarrassed, and I'd like to think that that was the last copy of The Sun he—or his wife—purchased. If another Christian had not visited their home, perhaps that unworthy secret would not have been exposed.

#3 Let's grow in our spiritual prayers for one another

The third area we can grow in, from Paul's example, is spiritual prayers for one another, *"Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."*

Paul wishes—or prays—Peace and love and faith and Grace to all his Christian friends. We have already noticed that Paul’s prayer requests, back in chapters 1 and 3, were all spiritual. It’s the same here again. What lovely gifts Paul wants God to bestow on his Christian friends. Peace—Peace with God that comes through the cross of Jesus Christ; and peace between brothers and sisters. Love—the bountiful and undying love of God for us; and the love between brothers and sisters in the church. Faith—the gift that believes the Gospel and saves us; and that day by day trust in the midst of the uncertainties and storms of life. Grace—the undeserved favour of God that is the fountain of all the gifts we receive from him.

How easy it is to look at the physical needs of one another, health, safety, material comfort, finances, employment, and remember only those in prayer. Paul teaches us to wish and to pray spiritual prayers.

4. Let’s grow in transforming the mundane things of life

The fourth growth area we learn from Paul’s example is the way he allows the Gospel to transform the ordinary and mundane tasks of life. What do I mean? Well, the customary way of ending a letter in Paul’s day, was to sign off, *“I pray that you fare well.”* Paul has taken that ordinary ending and elevated it to: *“Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.”*

When the 1700s evangelist George Whitfield used to write to fellow evangelist John Wesley, he too took the ordinary form of letter writing and elevated it. He would end his letters, not with the traditional “Yours Sincerely”, but like this: *“I am Reverend and Dear Sir, your most affectionate though unworthy brother and servant in Jesus Christ” G.W.* He took the mundane “Yours Sincerely” and sanctified and beautified it.

There are so many mundane things in life, from washing and cooking and doing the home finances and putting the kids to bed. How can we transform them, lift them, Gospelise them and sanctify them? Well at the least we can fill them with praise and thanksgiving can’t we? We can begin our meals with a word of thanksgiving, and end our days with praise:

*Fill all my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Your being and Thy ways.*

*Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.*

*So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free,
But all my life, in every part
Be fellowship with Thee.*

We're looking to Paul's godly example and asking how can we be more like Jesus:

- Let's grow in our honour of Gospel, workers
- Let's grow in the openness of our lives
- Let's grow in our spiritual prayers for one another
- Let's grow in transforming the mundane round of life, and finally

#5 Let's grow in our love for Jesus

"Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying (or sincere) love." Paul loved Jesus Christ, because he had first been loved by Jesus Christ: *"This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* (1 John 4:10) Paul loved Jesus because he had been loved by him. This was the inner spring of his life, and may it be the same with us. May we grow in our love for Jesus so that we can say that we love the Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.