

Love Incorruptible

In today's study we come to the conclusion of our studies in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. What a wonderful letter it is and how useful it is for us to study. In the text before us, Paul gives a customary "goodbye" to his readers, and yet this goodbye is chock full of distinctively Christian wisdom:

Ephesians 6:21-24

21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. **22** I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. **23** Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **24** Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

About 200 years ago Rev. Dr. Gardiner Spring, who pastored Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City for 63 years, wrote a little book entitled *Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character*. In this book, Dr. Spring explained that some traits that we think are peculiar to Christians actually aren't—like moral rectitude, eminent gifting, religious customs, intellectual knowledge of the Bible, and even our claims to certainty of our salvation. He also explains the *distinctive* traits of the true Christian, beginning with love for God. In the four verses above, Paul explains that his benediction is extended to those "who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible." He is describing the real Christian, much as he also does in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good..." The blessings we experience from God, as described in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, are given specifically to Christians only; and Christians are people who love in a distinctive way. Let's look at the distinctive traits of this distinctive virtue:

I. The distinctive love of the Christian is imminently practical (vv. 21-22)

Tychicus provides for us the model of distinctive Christian love. Paul calls him both "the beloved brother" and also "faithful minister in the Lord." The true Christian is one who builds sibling-type relationships with God's people, as did Tychicus. He obviously cared for the Apostle Paul in his lowest moments while imprisoned in Rome. But, as a faithful minister (servant), Tychicus also served with distinction. He obviously carried the letter to the Ephesians and to the Colossians (see Col. 4:7-9), and accompanied Onesimus to face his master, Philemon. What responsibilities were given to him! This happened because he was a *faithful* servant. D.L. Moody once said, "We may be too big for God to use, but never too small."

Notice also the duties given to Tychicus: he was to "tell everything" to the Ephesians about Paul's welfare and about encouragement for their hearts (see vs. 22). Paul did not want the Ephesians to worry about him while he was imprisoned, but, more importantly, he wanted Tychicus to strengthen their hearts by the Gospel. Tychicus was probably the first preacher who expounded Paul's letter to the Ephesians!

II. The distinctive love of the Christian is deeply rooted (vv. 23-24)

Paul begins Ephesians with a doxology, and he ends this letter with a benediction. We are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," Paul says in chapter 1, verse 4. Those blessings are described here: peace, love, faith, and grace. The distinctive motive for Christian love is the prevenient love of God for us. John says in his first epistle (1 John 4:10), "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." We love God and others because of our deep affection for the Lord and our aspiration to advance the cause of His Kingdom.

III. The distinctive love of the Christian never ends (vs. 24b)

The word “incorruptible” is taken from the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:52-53, “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable...” So our love is as imperishable as our resurrected bodies shall be. Praise the Lord!

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does Tychicus illustrate distinctively Christian love? How are you most challenged by his life and character?
2. How do you think Tychicus “encouraged their hearts” in verse 22? How should we encourage each other’s hearts?
3. Describe the peculiar motivational “soil” of Christian love, as described in verses 23 and 24.
4. What does Paul mean when he describes our love as “incorruptible?” How can we cultivate incorruptibility in our love?

Going Deeper

1. How does your love for Christ need to grow in its practicality?
2. How does your love for Christ need to grow in its perseverance?
3. What circumstances most strongly challenge your willingness to love your Christian brothers and sisters? What measures can you take to develop your love?