

THE FINAL FOUR EPHESIANS 6:21-24

Have you noticed that so much comes in fours...

East, west, north, and south...

Summer, fall, winter, and spring...

Right, left, up, and down...

Meat, milk, fruit, and vegetables...

Diamonds, hearts, clubs, and spades...

Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division...

Earth, wind, fire, and water...

(*how about*) Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John...

(*even*) Paul, John, George, and Ringo...

(*for Kathy and I it's*) Zach, Nat, Nick, and Mack...

And of course, every year at the end of March, college basketball wraps up its season by showcasing its *four* hottest teams in a play-off for the national title.

Championship weekend is called, "**The Final Four.**"

And in a sense this is what Paul does in the closing verses of Ephesians. He summarizes his whole letter with *A FINAL FOUR*... **peace, love, faith, and grace.**

All the Christian life can be summed up by these *final four blessings*... I've entitled this AM's message, "**The Final Four.**" Or perhaps a better title... "**The Fab Four.**"

Paul reminds us of **peace, love, faith, and grace.**

But first he speaks of the man who delivered his letter. He mentions his buddy, Tychicus, in 6:21, “But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and that he may comfort your hearts.”

It was customary for the Apostle Paul to dictate his letters to a penman, a stenographer - but when he had finished the main body of his message, he would take quill in hand, and write his closing comments himself.

This is what he does here. And the first thing he writes about is the man who'd been writing for him...

Tychicus was one of Paul's most trusted allies.

He was probably Paul's *penman*, but he was clearly Paul's **postman**. He delivered this letter from Rome to Ephesus, and along with it brought news from Paul.

On the same journey, Tychicus delivered the letters to Colossae and Philemon... He may've been from Ephesus. Here he's referred to as “*a beloved brother.*”

It's possible he was converted by Paul's witness.

Certainly, Paul had few friends more loyal than Tychicus. He accompanied Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem where Paul was arrested by the Jews... He stayed with Paul for the two years he was in prison in Caesarea... Tychicus even sailed with Paul to Rome.

Some scholars speculate that Tychicus was so devoted to Paul, that he volunteered to be Paul's slave.

In the Roman Empire the only persons allowed to officially travel with a prisoner were his slaves. *It's interesting to contemplate... Tychicus may've forfeited his personal freedoms to assist Paul in his ministry.*

Tychicus was certainly **a behind-the-scenes saint.**

Luke never records him working a miracle, or even preaching a sermon. Paul was the out-front guy, the one leading the charge. Tychicus was a loyal assistant.

His main activity was running errands for Paul.

In verse 21 Paul refers to him not only as a *“beloved brother,”* but as a *“faithful minister.”* The Greek term is **“deacon”** or **“servant.”** Perhaps Tychicus served the church in the official office of a deacon. Whether he did or not, Paul's friend definitely had a servant's heart.

In 2010, the San Francisco Giants won baseball's World Series. It was a big deal - first time in 52 years.

Think of all the baseball greats who've played ball on the Bay... the Willies, *Mays and McCovey* - the Bonds, *Bobby and Barry* - Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda, Felipe Alou, Will Clark - even Tim Lincecum.

But it wasn't a star who delivered the World Series trophy to the players in their locker room in Arlington, Texas. It was their long-time equipment manager...

Mike Murphy has cleaned spikes, and mended pants, and ordered bats, and rubbed baseballs for the Giants since 1958. *“Murph”* was there in the bad times.

After the World Series win, GM Brian Sabean remarked, **“When I saw him on the field afterward, I got teary-eyed. Murph is as important to this organization as anyone.**

He makes players feel comfortable in a family way, and that should not be overlooked.”

After delivering the *celebrated trophy* to *celebrating players*, Murph turned to a clubhouse attendant, and pointed to some equipment bags that needed to be loaded onto a truck... And just like that, still drenched with champagne, Mike Murphy was back to work.

No wonder he has a name plaque that sits on his desk that reads, “Mike Murphy, Character Builder.”

It’s a special man or woman who can find success in the shadow of another person. Yet this was Tychicus.

We would call him a “support person,” an “assistant.” But there’s little doubt, Paul would NOT have been the man he was without the loyal support of Tychicus - and other such assistants - like Timothy and Titus.

To get the full picture of the role Tychicus played in the Apostle’s life, recall 2 Corinthians 11. Paul itemizes his trials - the difficulties he endured over his lifetime...

“In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...”

Now remember that Tychicus was with Paul, and shared in many of these same ordeals.

Paul and Ty were more than casual acquaintances, or even close friends - they'd occupied the same foxhole. They were more like army buddies. The trials they endured together had bonded their hearts for life.

It reminds me of the Lone Ranger, and his sidekick, Tonto - one of the greatest TV friendships of all time.

Think of all the scrapes - near misses - harrowing experiences they overcame together. That's why Tonto had a special name he used for the Lone Ranger. He called him "kemosabe," which means, "faithful friend."

This describes the relationship between Paul and his sidekick, Tychicus - they were **kemosabes in Christ!**

Let me encourage you, if you've been blessed with such a friendship don't neglect it, or take it for granted.

Nothing is more valuable than a true kemosabe!

Some people go their whole life without experiencing this kind of friendship. That's why it amazes me how easily folks who are blessed to find such a relationship will jeopardize it by prioritizing other interests... *they'll relocate at the drop of a hat - or get distracted by a hobby - or clam up - or let little things cause a split...*

Then one day they wake up and the friendship they once valued, isn't what it use to be or could've been.

Listen to this quote from an older man nearing the end of his life, "What counts most, as I look back over the years, are not my accomplishments but rather the friends who worked with me as partners in these accomplishments. The funny thing

about it all is that the quality and quantity of those accomplishments are now fuzzy and unimportant in my mind, while the friendships remain crystal clear in my memory.”

A true friendship requires great effort. Real friends don't just drop in your lap. They have to be developed.

I love the description offered by actress Susan Saint James, “Friendship is like putting on pantyhose. You have to get one foot in and then the other, and wiggle around and tug until you get it right, and then pretty soon you say, “*I love these pantyhose - they fit!*” That sort of give-and-take occurred with Paul and Tychicus.

You don't endure the hardships they were forced to face without making an *investment in each other* and a *commitment to each other*. They **forged** a friendship.

To me, it's no accident Paul mentions his friend, Tychicus, after his thoughts on spiritual warfare...

All the battles they fought together - the attacks they endured together - the wounds they suffered together - the victories won together - cemented their friendship.

This is why if you don't have a *kemosabe in Christ - a really committed Christian friend...* I've got to ask, “Have you gotten involved at church? Jumped in a foxhole? Prayed next to someone, and for someone?”

Or have you been sitting at home, afraid to enlist, content to let other people fight the spiritual battles?

Paul knew that true friends have to be cultivated. *Why do you think Paul is sending this letter to the Ephesians?* He loved this Church, and wanted to see his friends there grow and abound in God's blessings.

In Paul's day writing was *painstaking* - parchment was *costly* - and delivery was *by foot...* Yet Paul saw the advantage, and made the effort, to stay in touch.

Remember the old jingle, "I went out to find a friend, but could not find one there, I went out to be a friend, and friends were everywhere!" Paul wrote an actual letter - with paper and ink - to cultivate a friendship... *the least we can do is send an email, or shoot a text.*

What old friend, or potential new friend, is God laying on your heart today - prompting you to make contact?

Don't lowball the value of *kemosabes in Christ!*

Which brings us to verse 23, the **Fab Four... Here's Paul's Final Four... Peace, Love, Faith, and Grace...**

"Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen." Paul is praying a fourfold blessing on these Ephesians - *for gifts he wants these friends to possess.*

Bible commentator Alexander Maclaren wrote of this passage, "There is no better test of a man than the things that he wishes for the people he loves the most. He desires for them his own ideal of happiness. *What do you desire most for those that are dearest to you?*"

It's true, what I desire for others reveals my own priorities - my own ideas of glory, riches, happiness...

If an angel came tomorrow and granted you one wish for your family and friends, what would it be?

Fame? Success? Money? Love? Happiness?

Would your wish be *material* or *spiritual* in nature?

Well, Paul wants his friends in Ephesus to possess spiritual wealth... and he has four blessings in mind...

First is **“peace...” “Peace to the brethren...”**

I remember reading years ago of an older couple who were set to retire. It was at the height of the Cold War and they were concerned about the nuclear threat.

Before moving they studied all the regions of the world to find the place least likely to experience war.

Finally, they decided on the Falkland Islands, just off the coast of Argentina. They moved in late 1981 a few months before this isolated island became a battleground between Great Britain and Argentina. It proves there's nowhere you can run from hostility...

For years, Atlantans have been moving to crime-free Lake Oconee - *where a few months ago they found a man decapitated in his garage and his wife's murdered body floating in the lake. The killer is still on the loose.*

There's no place on Earth where you can escape the consequences of sin. Realize, the only real peace we can confidently count on is the peace Jesus brings!

The Bible refers to Jesus as “the Prince of Peace.”

The reason there’s friction on the **horizontal plane** - *between man and his fellow man* - is because of the friction that seethes on the **vertical plane** - *between man and God*. *Human beings fight each other on the outside, because we fight against God on the inside.*

Ravi Zacharias was one of a group of Christian leaders who traveled to the Middle East to meet with members of Hamas - the pro-Palestinian, Islamic, terrorist group, who’s vowed the destruction of Israel.

The Christians were on a peace mission. They were trying to reason Israelis and Hamas to the peace table.

Their group was having dinner with a founder of Hamas, Sheikh Talal. He spoke of his imprisonment, and the children he had lost in their suicide bombings.

When Ravi spoke he asked about the Sheik’s thoughts on using his children as suicide bombers.

After the man answered, Ravi continued, “*Sheikh, you and I may never see each other again after tonight, so I want you to hear me. A little distance from here is a mountain on which Abraham went 5000 years ago to offer his son. And as the ax began to fall, God said, “Stop. I Myself will provide.”* The Sheikh nodded his head in agreement. Ravi continued his reasoning...

“And very close to where we’re sitting, Sheikh, there is a hill. Two thousand years ago, God kept that promise and brought His own Son, and the ax did not stop this time. He sacrificed His own Son.

And until you and I receive the Son, God provided, we will be offering our own sons and daughters on the battlefields of this world for land and power and pride.”

Ravi said as he spoke he saw the Sheikh’s lips quivering... No one said a word after he’d finished, but as they left the Sheikh kissed Ravi on both cheeks, and said to him, *“I hope I see you again some day.”*

For that day, Ravi Zacharias had made his point.

Until our hatred for each other is replaced with God’s love and grace, we’ll never be able to forgive one another and live in peace. Warfare will continue.

We sacrifice our own sons on the altar of prejudice and pride because we fail to humble ourselves and accept the Son of God who was sacrificed for us.

This is the point Paul made earlier in Ephesians 2.

In 2:14 he wrote of Jesus, that He has broken down the wall of separation between people groups, by reconciling us to God. Jesus *“Himself is our peace.”*

That means when *you embrace Jesus* and when *I embrace Jesus* - *we embrace each other* in a real way.

He is the commonality that transcends our divisions.

Jesus brings together Arabs and Jews, Blacks and Whites, Women and Men, Young and Old, Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children, Brother and Brother.

He really does offer a supra-natural peace.

For some people when they gave their life to Jesus they were freed instantly from cigarettes or cocaine.

For me, I experienced a different kind of deliverance.

Thirty-six years ago I gave my life to Jesus. I became new inside, and from that moment on all the bigotry I'd ever held in my heart for people different than me, disappeared. I was liberated. Freed to love.

God's love took over. I saw people differently. And it was as miraculous, as if I'd been freed from alcohol.

This is the peace that Jesus promised us in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." The treaties negotiated by this world are only cease-fires. They end the hostilities only long enough for both sides to reload.

Human-contrived peace is temporary and superficial. It sends the fighters back to their corners until the next round. But it doesn't give them a reason to be friends.

Whereas, the peace that Jesus brings buries the hatchet once and for all. His cross resolves the conflict.

In fact, the peace of God runs deep. It's not dependent on an outward truce, or a situational calm.

It's spiritual and inward. It transcends circumstances.

Think of a violent storm at sea. The winds and waves are churning up the surface of the water. Anything caught in the whitecaps is in for a wild, tumultuous ride.

But dive deep - dive to the ocean floor - and you'll find a world undisturbed by the turmoil on the surface.

And this is the secret of God's peace!...

Don't look for peace in the midst of circumstances, go deep into Jesus - dive into the sea of God's love - and you'll find a secret place of calm and composure.

If you want God's peace - the answer is depth!

Author Kent Hughes writes, "For those who have not experienced this peace, no words will suffice. For those who have experienced it, no words will quite do."

This kind of miracle peace is a blessing from God and it's Paul's desire that He grant it to the Ephesians.

As well as "love..." "Peace to the brethren, and love... from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Fourteen times in Ephesians Paul mentions the word "love." It's the key ingredient in the Christian life.

When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest of all the commandments, He gave two... *Love the Lord with all you've got, and then love your neighbor as yourself.*

So much is contingent on our loving God.

1 Corinthians 2:9, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

1 Corinthians 13 tells us we can speak with tongues, and move mountains, and give away all our money to feed the poor... but without love we're nothing.

It's said, "When God measures us He doesn't wrap the tape around our minds or muscles - but our heart."

It's so important that we love God, yet so often it's like keeping a flame alive on a windy day. There's so many strong winds that want to blow in and snuff it out.

It's the tendency for love to grow cold.

Someone once asked, "What's so remarkable about love at first sight? It's when people have been looking at each other for 50 years that it becomes remarkable."

Love has a way of growing stale and stagnant even in our relationship with God. Notice, Paul's statement in verse 24, recipients of God's grace are those who love Him sincerely. Their love is untainted by hypocrisy.

God doesn't expect us be perfect, or spotless. The psalmist says He knows our frame, that we're but dust.

Yet the one thing God does expect is sincerity!

Often when I officiate a wedding I tell the couple, "None of us expect you to be perfect. We all know better. But we do expect you to be faithful." And this is also true in our love for God - that we remain loyal.

In the halls of Heaven you'll find *gold*, and *silver*, and *pearls*, but you won't find anything *plastic* - or phony!

We're told in 1 Corinthians 3 all Christians will pass before *the judgment seat of Christ* - not to determine our salvation. It's not our faith that's being tested.

It's our works. The good deeds done for Jesus sake - *were they done out of love?* Or for selfish, egotistical reasons? *What was our motivation?* Were we sincere?

There're actually two letters to the Ephesians in your Bible. No, you won't find a *1 and 2 Ephesians*... You have to go to Revelation 2 to find the second letter to the Ephesians. It was written not by Paul, but by Jesus.

One of Jesus' letters to the seven churches was to the church at Ephesus. And He told them **they had left their first love**. Their love was no longer fresh, and warm, and sincere - it had chilled - it was growing cold.

In Revelation 2 the Church at Ephesus had a full docket of service. But they were going through the *motions* - absent the *devotion*. It was time to repent - fan the flame - recall their initial responses to Jesus.

It was time for them to **return to their first love!** They needed to prioritize the Lord's love for them.

If you want to avoid a love that grows cold... If your desire is to sustain a passionate, sincere love for Jesus... then here's an important verse to remember...

1 John 4:19, **"We love Him because He first loved us."** Our love for God is fueled by His love for us.

This is why we're told in Jude 21, **"Keep yourself in the love of God."** It's our understanding and focus on God's love for us, that keeps our love for Him alive.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul states, **"For the love of Christ compels us."** His love is compelling, appealing, attractive... It's our great motivator. God's love for me is the internal combustion engine of the Christian life.

His love for us stokes our love for Him.

Sir Isaac Watts wrote this of God's love, **"Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."**

Samuel Rutherford put it, “Christ's love is the hottest coal that ever I felt. Oh, but the smoke of it be hot! Cast all the salt sea on it, it will flame; hell cannot quench it; many, many waters will not quench (His) love.” God’s love is an eternal flame. That’s why the key to keeping your torch lit - is to keep dipping it into His flame.

God’s **love** for us stirs up our love for God. His love is a blessing we can’t live without, and so is **“faith...”**

Verse 23 tells us, **“Peace to the brethren, and love with faith..”** *“Love with faith”* is a powerful combination.

The assurance of God’s love not only fuels my love for God, *but my faith in Him as well.* **Love and trust go together.** Often, we love a person because we trust them, and we trust that person because we love them.

Love and trust go hand in hand. One thing is for sure, without trust our love won’t last for long.

Once a downtown high-rise caught fire. And of course, a crowd gathered to watch it burn. But the people were horrified to see a little girl standing in a windowsill - smoke billowing out from behind her.

To make matters worse, this young girl was blind.

The flames were getting hotter and hotter, but the firemen were unable to position the ladders close enough for her to grasp, so they called for her to jump.

These were skilled fireman who were trained to catch folks in the canvas, but the firemen couldn't talk the little girl into jumping... *until her daddy arrived.*

When dad got on the bullhorn and told his daughter to jump, she immediately leaped from the ledge as if leaping into her daddy's arms. The girl was so relaxed she avoided any of the minor injuries that often occur.

She trusted her Father's voice because she knew he loved her! As I said, *“love with faith”* is a powerful team.

The more you know that God loves you, the more relaxed you'll be when He calls on you to jump!

Faith is more than agreeing on certain facts about God. It's more than an intellectual nod. Biblical faith is trusting in God's promises until I'm willing to act on their reliability. It's staking *my future on His promises...*

Once upon a time, three men, *a philosopher, a scientist, and a beggar* were stranded in a cave just above the ocean. They were surrounded by rock walls, and the tide was rising fast. They were about to drown.

Just in time, the rescuers dropped them a rope...

The philosopher examined it, *“Ah, that looks like a rope, but I might be mistaken - it could be an illusion or wishful thinking.”* He refused to grab on and drowned.

The scientist also saw the rope, *“This is an 11mm polyester rope with a breaking strain of 2800kg. It conforms to the MR 10-81 standard.”* Then he gave an exhaustive analysis of the rope's chemical properties. But neither did he grab on to the rope and he drowned.

Yet the beggar had a different approach... *“I'm not sure if that's a rope or a python's tail, but it's my only hope, so I'm holding on for dear life.”* And because he did, it gave the rescuers a way to save his very life!

And this is saving faith. It's not understanding all the intricacies of God's existence, or methodologies, or even His nature. It's recognizing the love of God enough to *grab on* and *hold on* to His great promises!

Faith is **hope with a grip!** It's grabbing on to God.

Faith is the pine tar a baseball player smears on the handle of his bat to enhance his grip. And just as pine tar helps him hold on during his swing, faith helps us.

When it's your time in the batter's box of life - when it's your opportunity to take a swing at life - you need to apply the spiritual stick 'em that we call *faith*. *Don't you think you'll be more successful with a stronger faith?*

Finally, in verse 24, Paul mentions **“grace...”** **“Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ...”**

Recall Paul introduced his letter to the Ephesians in 1:2 with the greeting of **“grace and peace.”** Grace was his first word to them. Now it's also his last word.

The term translated **“grace”** is a Greek word **“charis,”** from which we get our English word **“charisma.”**

And it has two meanings. Grace refers to a **spiritual endowment** and to a **spiritual empowerment**. Here's another way to say it, grace is **judicial** and **effectual**.

On the one hand, grace is **judicial**.

Grace is God tinkering with the heavenly ledgers. He blots out our sin, and credits us with a righteousness we could never earn. God cooks the books in our favor.

But all this tinkering is done legally, since it's based on the work of His Son - the price Jesus paid for us. For Jesus' sake the Judge issues a ruling in our favor.

This is the grace Paul wrote about in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” It’s a free gift.

There’s nothing we can do to earn or merit God's favor. Billy Graham says of grace, “It cannot be sought, bought, or wrought.” It was purchased on the cross.

It reminds me of a story from the Spanish-American War. Teddy Roosevelt and his roughriders desperately needed supplies. Roosevelt asked Clara Barton (of Red Cross fame) if he could purchase some supplies.

When she denied his request, Teddy became furious. He asked, “Well, how then do I get supplies?”

Clara Barton replied, “Colonel, just ask!” What he needed couldn’t be *purchased* - only *received* freely!

This is why I say, grace is an **endowment** given to us by God when we humble ourselves, admit our need, and just ask. *But it’s more!* It’s also an **empowerment**.

For grace doesn’t just alter the heavenly ledgers - it alters me! It’s **effectual**. It has an impact on my life.

In Ephesians 4:7 Paul speaks of grace this way, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Then he discusses *our place* in Christ, *our purpose* for Christ, *the power* of Christ...

This is also how Paul defines grace in Ephesians 2:10. After he speaks of grace as an endowment given by God freely - in the very next verse, he describes the impact that endowment has upon our everyday lives.

“For we are His workmanship (His “poema” - God’s work of art) created in Christ Jesus for good works...”

Grace doesn’t just tinker with the heavenly ledgers, it pulls me from the ledge! It gives me a reason to live.

God’s grace impacts my life. It sucks me into its web. It drives me to greater love and good works for God.

Hear Paul speak to the Corinthians, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

It was God’s grace that made Paul the spiritual giant he became. There was no room for boasting. It was Christ who worked *for him - in him - and through him*.

It’s ironic... it’s grace that puts all of God’s blessings in the palm of our hands - and then it’s grace that keeps our hands from trying to grab hold of the glory.

That all God’s blessings are given by grace, assures that all God’s blessings are to the praise of His glory.

Well, there it is... Paul's letter to the Ephesians!

A letter *bubbling over with blessings* - filled to the brim with **peace**, and **love**, and **faith**, and **grace**.

These were Paul's **final four** thoughts. May they be the **top four** priorities in our life, and toward the people we love... I pray that *God would grant you His peace... His love... a greater faith... and His glorious grace...*