

HOW TO GREET THE SAINTS

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At the conclusion of Paul's letters, he greets believers and exhorts believers to greet one another. Seemingly tagged on at the end of some theologically-rich epistles, readers can easily skim past these verses. But could it be that here in these final words, God instructs us through the pen of the Apostle Paul as to how to greet the saints (that is, every person who is *in Christ Jesus*). So, how should believers greet one another? How should we greet every single saint?

Here are 5 pastoral encouragements.

1. With INTENTIONALITY.

At the end of his epistle to the Philippian church, Paul says to greet 'every saint' in Christ. I think it's fairly understood that we don't naturally greet every single person we see on Sundays in our local churches. In fact, if we were honest, we probably would say that we would rather sit down, enjoy a moment or two to ourselves when we arrive moments before the opening of the service. And then when the closing prayer is finished, we would rather slip out the back and head home without interacting much with folks. But the loving and wise Spirit of God does not permit that mentality in the local church. Rather, through Paul's pen, we are called to greet every *saint*. This is an imperative and something that we are *all called to do*. We are to greet one another with intentionality because we are tempted to sometimes sit and remain to ourselves and *not* approach anyone because, quite frankly, it takes effort, time, and sometimes patience to hear people pour out their heart (and even, receive some fairly messy situations and desperate prayer requests!). It's easier to *not* greet people. But the Lord calls us to intentionally greet one another regardless of whether one is extroverted or introverted, outgoing or not!

2. With AFFECTION.

Many of Paul's epistles speak of greeting one another with love, with a holy kiss. In that culture and at that time, this greeting was a mark of genuine love and tender affection. The believers greeted one another with the utmost tenderness and warmth. The imperative is to greet one another. How are we to do this? With great affection, with tender warmth, with genuine love, with brotherly kindness. Dear Christians, are we affectionate and warm and full of brotherly kindness when we greet the saints when we gather together? Are we warm towards them? Are we a "refreshment" to others when we greet them, welcome them, speak to them, and pray for them? Does your conduct, your demeanor, your care, your focus, your intentionality speak to your brotherly affection for your fellow believers? May the Lord help us to greet one another with affection and brotherly-love.

3. With IMPARTIALITY.

There is no partiality with God! Amazingly, the Apostle Paul reminds believers so frequently in his writings that there is no division amongst God's people. Think of it: Jew and Gentile can worship the risen Christ *together*. The rich and the poor can worship Christ *together*, side by

side! Yes, the young and the old can exalt the one, true God *together*, in worship! James speaks directly to this issue of greeting one another without impartiality. Dear friends: we could all be honest enough to confess that there are some people that we're more comfortable approaching on Sundays and there are others who are, quite frankly, different than us! And if it were not for the saving grace of Christ, we probably would have no interactions with that person in our lives. And yet, by God's wondrous grace and wise wisdom, He has brought many believers from different backgrounds and cultures together in this living and growing and wondrous organism called the Church! There are no boundaries or barriers or divisions! We are all one *in Christ Jesus*. All who are believers in Christ by faith alone belong to Christ! Perhaps you could make it a point to approach *one person each week* that you may not normally go up to and seek to warmly greet them and speak one encouraging word of grace to them for their edification! O the joy and sweetness in a local church if *every saint* approached one another without partiality to greet them, sit with them, talk with them, pray with them, and show brotherly kindness to them!

4. With SPECIFICITY.

Many times in Paul's letters he greets people by name. The book of Romans (ch. 16) provides a perfect example of Paul's profuse and specific greetings to the saints. In Philippians 4, however, Paul does not greet people by name, but he does say to greet every saint. Dear Christian: do you *know* the fellow saints in your local church? Do you specifically pray for them? Do you know their needs? Their struggles? Their fears? Their joys? Their evangelistic encounters? Their causes for rejoicing? Do you greet folks and just say week after week after week, "hi, how are you? How was your week?" Or is there any greater depth that you go into in probing the heart, digging for some specifics if a generic answer is given? How can you take the simple greetings and greet one another with specificity by asking good questions, heart-probing questions, and sermon-engaging questions, and Christ-focused questions? Paul greets the saints in Philippi and assures them that the gospel has permeated even the imperial palace of Caesar! O let us give such specific encouragements to one another of how God is working, how Christ is worthy, how the Spirit is empowering, and how the gospel is advancing! May the Lord help us!

5. With GRACE.

In a remarkably Pauline feature that distinguishes his conclusions from the rest of ancient Greco-Roman letter writing conclusions, he reminds the Christians of God's grace found in Christ that is with them always! In fact, often Paul bookends his letters with the reality of God's grace that is given to them (see, e.g., Philippians 1:2 and 4:23). Why? Because all that Christians are is theirs by virtue of God's grace! Believers are nothing and have nothing except by God's undeserved grace. Paul reminds the saints that their position *in Christ* is all of grace. And he reminds them that they are sustained *in Christ* all by grace! God will carry them to glory all by grace! Indeed, we stand confidently in this grace of God! So when Paul bids his farewell to the believers whom he affectionately loves, he reminds them of the wondrous and unfathomable grace of God that began the good work in them, that sustains the preserving work in them, and guarantees the sanctifying work in them till glory! O that we as Christians would greet one another with such thoughtful words of theological depth and richness! Consider how local congregations would be further edified and strengthened as each saint would speak a brief word of encouragement and truth to one another as we remind each other of God's faithful grace

and unfailing favor toward us -- in salvation, in suffering, in sanctification, indeed, in any situation!
May the Lord help us to thoughtfully, theologically, and joyfully greet one another with grace-filled speech!