

# Don't Miss the Greetings and Benediction

By Steve Burchett



I have never regretted slowing down and meditating on the greetings and benedictions at the end of Paul's writings. Here is the latest I've been contemplating:

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Philippians 4:21-23)

It's tempting to race past sections like these thinking they are mere formalities, but there is always something significant to learn. The final verses in Philippians tell us a few things about God's people all over the world.

First of all, we see that *God's people all over the world greet one another*. Multiple greetings are mentioned, including Paul's own to the Philippians (21a), "The brothers who are with Paul" (21b), and "All the saints" in Rome (22a), "especially those of Caesar's household" (22b). According to one Greek dictionary (BDAG), to greet someone is "to engage in hospitable recognition of another." Face-to-face greetings are a way to say, "You are welcome here!" But Paul is not in Philippi; he is writing from Rome and sending greetings from there. So a "greeting" in that sense is an expression of affection and desire for another's well-being — "We are sending our love from here to you there!"

Paul's greeting is to "every saint in Christ Jesus" (21a). Throughout the New Testament, all who are "in Christ," all who are believers, are called "saints" — holy ones, set apart from sin to Christ. Why emphasize greeting "every" believer at Philippi? Because the church was having disunity problems (see 2:3-4 and 4:2). In a divided church, Paul's greeting was a subtle way to communicate that every individual in the church counted and must not be neglected.

Nothing has changed today. Your church may not have the same kind of division as the church in Philippi, but we are sometimes neglectful of welcoming *every* saint in Christ. One of our pastors admonished the men of our church once because he noticed too many of us were walking right past the teenage boys, some believers, as we entered the men's meeting. We needed that correction!

Second, observe from the various greetings at the end of Philippians that God's people all over the world love *God's people in different locations*. These greetings to the Philippians came all the way from believers in Rome, approximately 800 miles away (a long journey in that day). Epaphroditus was from Philippi (see 2:25), but he had been there in Rome with Paul. We can assume that the believers in Rome heard about and talked about the believers in Philippi with him and Paul and, from a distance, came to love their fellow believers such that they wanted to make sure that Paul included their greetings.

This is a helpful example for churches today. Technology has made sending our love to believers in other locations incredibly simple. Sadly, online platforms have provided outlets for Christians to write negatively against other true believers. It is shameful. These are brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. Wouldn't it be better to be known for loving communication with other believers? Are there ways your church might more proactively send greetings to churches elsewhere?

One of the most interesting parts of the greetings section at the end of Philippians is when Paul mentions that "those of Caesar's household" send their greetings (22b). A "household" was not just blood relatives within the royal family, but also included slaves, servants, and even freedman who offered services (education, medical, etc.). This means there were a number of people under the charge of wicked Nero who sent their greetings to the believers in Philippi.

Therefore, third, we learn that *God's people all over the world are sometimes found in the most surprising places!* God has a way of getting the good news even to the most secure, seemingly impenetrable locations. In this instance, he did it through the imprisonment of Paul (cf. 1:12-13). Omnipotent love cannot be stopped! What a privilege it is to see the powerful gospel advance to sometimes surprising locations and, when possible, to interact warmly with people we never would have known nor cared for apart from Christ.

Paul ends his letter to the Philippians with these words: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." What is unique about this prayer for blessing is the phrase "with your spirit." It's as if Paul is praying, "May the riches and strength and blessings that are ours in the Lord Jesus Christ engulf you and fill you and consume you to the very core of your being!" Here, then, is a fourth idea to take away from Paul's concluding words: *God's people all over the world need God's grace to permeate their entire existence.*

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit as you seek to apply not only what is in the main section of Philippians, but *even* what is in Paul's concluding words.

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