**FINAL GREETINGS**

***21Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. 22All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.***

***23The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen***

**Philippians 4:21-23 (NIV)**

As with most of his letters and in keeping with the conventions of letter-writing in the Greco-Roman world, Paul concludes with the standard greetings (4:21,22) and a grace-benediction (4:23). Here they are brief, probably because of the nature of the preceding promise in 4:19 and the doxology in 4:20.

Paul’s closing remarks vary a little but tend to have these three elements

(1) the imperative to greet the saints

(2) greetings from his companions

(3) greetings from other ‘saints’ where he is

*‘Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus*’ (4:21). Paul’s brevity is understandable both in terms of his friendship (letters in the Greco-Roman world were notable for their brief closing greetings) and the preceding doxology conclusion. Just as friends didn’t culturally need to express thanks, they likewise didn’t need elaborate greetings. Too many words might take away from the very words he most wanted the Philippians to remember – God’s glory out of which He lavishes riches on them in Christ, to whom all glory is now due.

‘*Greet all the saints’* is more literally: ‘greet every saint.’ Because Paul regularly used the plural when referring to the congregation or group as a whole, his use of the singular here is intentional. The greeting is not to the community lumped together as a whole, but to each member of the community individually.

‘*The brothers who are with me* *send you greetings*’ (4:21). Just as Paul does not mention anyone in Philippi by name, neither does he here mention any companions, even though this greeting makes it clear some of them are still with him.

‘*All the saints send you greetings*’ (4:22). This third in the series of greetings reaches out to the broader circle of believers, even if some of them might not wish to be included (1:15,17).

‘*Especially those who belong to Caesar’s household*’ (4:22). This little phrase, along with the mention of the Praetorian Guard in 1:13, gives the strongest evidence for Paul’s imprisonment being in Rome. The significance of the greeting would not be lost on the Philippian believers. Philippi was a Roman colony where devotion to Caesar had a long history. While the Philippians suffered at the hands of Roman citizens loyal to Caesar, Paul is a prisoner of Caesar. But in making him a prisoner at the heart of the Empire, Rome has brought in a member of the ‘opposition’ who is in the process of bringing others to Christ in their own very prison. Paul has either found or made disciples of Jesus among members of the Imperial household. Here is a word of encouragement to the Philippians in the midst of their struggle. The ‘word of life’ to which they hold firm in the midst of a ‘crooked and perverse generation’ (2:15,16) has already penetrated the heart of the Empire. They have brothers and sisters in Caesar’s own household who are on their side and now send them greetings.

*‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen*’ (4:23). Paul signs off on all his letters with this or a very similar grace-benediction. The standard ‘good-bye’ in Greek letters was ‘be strong.’ As with all his salutations, Paul ‘Christianises’ his greetings. It is ‘grace,’ the favour of God that is theirs through ‘*the Lord Jesus Christ’*that he seeks for them. Although grace is primarily from God in Paul’s letters, he sometimes attributes grace directly as from Christ. But in the grace benedictions, it is invariably *‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’* that he prays will be with them. This final grace ‘bookends’ his letter, which began with grace (1:2).

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

*Paul’s letter to the Philippians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) by Gordon Fee (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995)

*Philippians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by Ralph Martin (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1987)

*The Message of Philippians* (The Bible Speaks Today Series) by Alec Motyer (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1984)

*The Holy Bible (New International Version)* (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO., USA, 1984)

*The Prison Letters* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)