

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 1:15-16
Sermon #9
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THE PEOPLE PAUL PRAYED FOR
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Take your Bibles and turn to Ephesians chapter one.

For those of you who are here for the first time in this present series we are going through the Book of Ephesians. We want to spend the morning on two verses--verses 15 and 16--words that are repeated almost verbatim in some of Paul's other epistles, words which we might be inclined to think are not quite as important because they really are more introductory in nature than they have to do with the main message of the book. Sometimes the statements that are repeated the most and that we are most familiar with are statements that hold great truths for us and great blessing if we take the time to stop and think about them.

If you are familiar with Paul's epistle to the Colossians, written by Paul from Rome at the same time that he wrote the Ephesian letter and very similar to the Ephesian epistle. You may have been struck by a unique difference in the way these two epistles begin. If you will turn on in the New Testament to the Book of Philippians and then to the Book of Colossians, you will see that the words that I have for my text this morning in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses are in the third and fourth verses of Colossians one where Paul says, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints." Then he goes from this into his prayer, down in verse 9, and that really leads into a passage of thanksgiving, beginning with verse 12 when he refers to salvation and what the Lord Jesus Christ has done in salvation. You could say that verse 12 really compares with verse 3 in Ephesians chapter 1. So the order here is different. In Ephesians chapter 1 he goes immediately into his thanksgiving to God for salvation, then he expresses the fact that he is, from the time he heard of their faith and their love he has been praying for them, then we have his prayer. But, you see, in Colossians you have this thanksgiving for them first of all and then his prayer and then he speaks of the Gospel and what God has been pleased to do for us in Christ.

If you were to compare Ephesians with most of Paul's epistles, you would see that the Book of Ephesians is the one where he has really departed from his normal procedure in writing a letter, because, normally it would have been right to identify himself and to identify them and to express his desire that they would experience the grace and peace of God, and then to say, "I have been praying for you and this is what I have been praying about," and then going on into the message of the epistle. But here you see in verse 3 that he just begins to express his blessing to God, his praise to God, his doxology which occupies verses 3 through 14. Then, when you get down to verse 15 it seems like he says, "well, I forgot some things that I meant to say at the beginning." So he says, "After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, and this is what I am praying for."

Why do we have this difference in Ephesians?

I am not sure that I have the real answer to that question; but I am going to venture an answer. This is a guess and I hope that it is a sanctified guess. I would attribute Paul's departure from his normal order here in the Book of Ephesians to the fact that his heart was just so full and overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to God that he really could not contain himself. You see just a flowing out of his heart and into his pen and into this epistle. It just seems to me that Paul was going through one of those times in his life, and perhaps you have experienced this as a Christian, when your heart has been full of thanksgiving to God. Almost spontaneously, without any real separation, why you

may have intended to come to the Lord with certain requests and burdens, as we all do, but then this praise begins to pour out and you realize that God has given you a spirit of thanksgiving and worship and you, for the moment, just delight in what Christ has done for you and what He is continuing to do and what He eventually is going to do--all these things that Paul mentions in this. Then he comes back to express his thanksgiving for the people and to tell them how he prays for them.

We should be ready to praise the Lord at any time, should we not? In fact, we are taught in Scripture "In everything to give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18). The longest book in the Bible, as you well know, is a book of praise, of worship, of thanksgiving, the hymnbook of Israel, the Book of Psalms. It is characteristic of the apostles as they write. It was characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. So we need to be ready to praise the Lord, but it is wonderful that the Lord sometimes gives us those times like Paul was evidently experience when our hearts are so full of thanksgiving to God for saving us and what salvation means that we have trouble containing our selves and our hearts just simply overflow with praise and thanksgiving to Him. It is easy to thank the Lord for our health--our health is important. It is easy to thank the Lord for our food, our clothing, for our homes, for our jobs, for all of the material and physical blessings that God gives to us; but we as the peopel of God have a reason to give thanks to God that the world does not know anything about. That is the greatest reason that God in His wonderful grace has saved us. He is working out His purposes in our lives. He has brout us into His family. He has forgiven us of our sins. He has made us heirs of heaven. And He has sealed us in Christ so that we can never lose the blessings that He has so graciously given to us in Christ. So, as Paul began to write, his doxolog poured out of his heart and into his letter. I trust that the Lord will give us many times like this. Surely, the more we know about salvation, the more we will marvel at what God has done for us and the greater our praise to Him will be for our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Along this line, Paul goes on to speak of the fact that when, from the time that he heard that God had done in their hearts what he has been talking about in those first fourteen verses, he ceased not to give thanks for them as well and continued making mention of them in his prayers. Then he does, as we will see in the following Sundays, the Lord willing, the nature of his requests. Mr. Mathison read these to us this morning beginning with verse 17 and it just rolls on down into the end of the chapter where he again is just manifesting that his heart is lifted up with thanksgiving and praise to God.

Here we see Paul describing the kind of people he was praying for and then the manor in which he prayed for them. We learned from the very first verse of the book, Ephesians 1:1, that he was addressing himself "to the saints which are at Ephesus" and then he gives them another name. He calls them "the faithful in Christ Jesus." That is, they were not only people who professed faith in Jesus Christ, but they were continuing to manifest day by day that they really knew the Saviour.

He describes them differently in verses 15 and 16. Let me just divide these verses as they are divided in our Bibles and say that in verse 15 we have Paul's description of what a Christian is. This is not the only time that he describes a Christian, but he certainly does here when he says, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." Then, he speaks in verse 16 of the way that he prayed for them. I think that you are going to see from what he says here that he has two things in mind: "I cease not (number one) to give thanks for you, (number two) making mention of you in my prayers."

Now let us look first of all at his description of a Christian. Paul did not call them Christians. That word is actually used, I think, just three times in the New Testament. That is a title that has become very common to all of us; in fact, to the whole world. I am using it this morning because I want you to compare what Paul said with your idea of what a Christian is so that you can see whether or not you are right in the way you are using this term. I would suppose that in this group that we know what Christians are. We know what it means to be a Christian. Paul said that a Christian is a person

who is characterized by two things. One (this is in verse 15): faith in the Lord Jesus; and secondly: love unto all the saints.

The first, you see, has to do with our Saviour; the second has to do with the people of God. The first has to do with the upward look; the second has to do with our relationship to each other in the family of God. These are the true people of God: people who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus and who manifest love to all the saints. If these qualities are lacking in a person who claims to be a Christian, he is not a Christian in the true New Testament sense of the word. If either one of these is missing, that person has no right to claim to be a Christian. One has to do with the Lord, the other has to do with the Lord's people. A Christian is one who believes in the Lord Jesus and he has a genuine love in his heart for the people of God.

When Paul said, as he did here in this verse, "After I heard of your faith," he did not mean that he was personally acquainted with many of them, because you remember in Acts 18 and again in Acts 20 we read of his contact with Ephesus and then in Acts 20 with the Ephesian elders. He knew many of them. He had seen some of them. But, obviously, after he left and went on to minister in other places the report had come to him that more and more people were trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and more of the people of Ephesus were being drawn into this fellowship of the Lord's people in that city. Such a report as this never failed to move the heart of the Apostle Paul to pray for the Lord's people.

When you hear of Christians in a certain place, what is your response? Is it, "well, it is interesting to know that the Lord has some people there?" or can you say as you hear about the saints of God in different areas, "well, ever since I heard about you why I have been praying for you and praying that the Lord would bless and use you there for His glory?" This is what Paul did. "When I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

Now let us look at these two characteristics a little more closely.

"Your faith in the Lord Jesus." That is a very simple statement, is it not, but it is very profound and important in its meaning. Paul had said in verse 13 that they had faith. You will notice, looking at that verse again, that he said, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." He recognized that they were people who believed in the Lord Jesus. Perhaps we could punctuate that verse in this way--the Lord's name. "After I heard of your faith in the Lord, Jesus." He is the Lord Whose name is Jesus. Paul had been speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. He mentions His full name there in verse 2 and all through these 14 verses. He had been speaking of what God has done for us in Christ, or in Jesus Christ, or Christ Jesus. Here he just uses this abbreviated term, "the Lord Jesus." They were trusting in the Lord Jesus. They believed that He was the Lord is the significance of it, that He was God the Son, that He was deity; but they also believed that He was truly man. They believed that He was Jesus. They believed that He was God and man in one person. They believed in His mission in the world. They believed in the meaning of His name Jesus because, you remember, He was called Jesus because "He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Believing in the Lord Jesus means that they not only claimed to trust Him as Saviour, but they believed what had been taught about Him. They believed that He was God manifested in the flesh who had come into the world to offer a sacrifice for sinners and they had put their faith in Christ and were trusting in Him alone. And most of them, you remember, had turned from the worship of Diana of the Ephesians. It meant a break, a complete transformation in their lives, a great upheaval as far as their relationship to other Ephesians was concerned; but their faith was in Him as a person. Their faith was in the Lord Jesus Christ and in what He had done. So faith in accepting is accepting what the Bible says about the Lord Jesus. Faith is believing that He died for the sins of those who will trust in Him, then it is actually putting our trust in Him as Saviour. Faith is a matter which transpires in the heart. As Paul says in Romans 10:9, "We believe in our hearts that God has raised

him from the dead."

The first thing that Paul mentions, "After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus," he is really talking about something which initially you cannot see. As I look at you, this morning, I know most of you claim to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I claim to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a matter of our heart relationship. Therefore, we have to depend upon what takes place outwardly as evidence that what we say has taken place inwardly really has taken place. When Paul puts these two together, "when I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus (that is in the heart), and your love unto all the saints." Now, this is something that comes out in the open and it is something that can be seen. True faith in the Lord Jesus will always be accompanied with a love for all others who also know the Lord Jesus. You know, I am suspicious, very suspicious of a person who claims to be a Christian but never wants to go to church when the Bible says this and makes this very, very clear. The Apostle John wrote many, many years later these wonderful words that you find in 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Then he says this (this is John the beloved making this very severe statement), "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." That means that he has never been saved. He is not a Christian. He is not a child of God. He may claim to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but the evidence of true faith and the initial evidence of true faith is that I begin to love the people that before I did not want to have anything to do with.

I can understand why people who are not Christians do not want to come to church: They have not had their hearts changed. But it ought to be impossible for us to understand also how a person who claims to be a Christian does not want to come to church. These two things go hand in hand. There is going to be a bond of affection. It is not just limited to church. I am just using this as an illustration. We love to be with the people of God. We want to help them in any way that we can. We sense that we derive spiritual blessing and help from our contact with them. Whenever you find true faith in the Lord Jesus, you will always find a love for others. You notice that the Apostle Paul in this fifteenth verse says, "love unto all the saints." That is, not just the people who come to Trinity Bible Church. We may know them the best, and because of our contact with each other love them more, but wherever people are who know the Lord Jesus Christ. If you meet a person who is a perfect stranger and you find out that they are trusting in the Saviour, you immediately feel that your heart is drawn to them. That is what the Apostle Paul was talking about here. This is not the only mark of a Christian, but nothing precedes this. Perhaps this is the first consciousness that a person has that God has made a change in his heart when he finds that he loves the people of God and he wants to be with the people of God.

I want you to think about these two points in connection with your own life. If you profess to be a Christian, do you really believe what the Bible teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He is the only One through Whom we can come to God? The only One through Whom we can have our sins forgiven? I know lots of people who claim to be Christians, but they do not believe what the Bible teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not believe that He is the Son of God. They might believe that He was a great man and a great teacher and perhaps lived the best life anybody else has lived, but they do not see anything sacrificial in His death. They do not see that God was dealing with His Son there in behalf of the sins of His people. What is your attitude toward the Lord Jesus? Do you believe what the Bible teaches about Him and are you steadfastly trusting in Him as the One and the only One Who can forgive your sins and Who can guarantee that someday you are going to be in heaven? Do you love the people of God? Are you here this morning because somebody made you come? or Are you here because you want to be here?

There is so much more that could be said about this, is there not? I do not have any more time to spend on it this morning; but remember that the Lord Jesus Himself said, while He was on earth, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you." Then listen to these words, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

What kind of impression do you think the world gets when they see a church that is torn apart with strife and bickering and fighting and difficulties of all kinds? Surely this is the reason that when the Lord Jesus was here on earth He prayed fervently, and you find it in John 17 several times, that His people would be one--that His people would be one. We learned, did we not, back in the tenth verse "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." There is not anything on earth that compares with the fellowship of the people of God. No lodge compares with this. No sorority or fraternity compares with this. There is not any organization that compares with this. This is the closest relationship that is possible for people to have. You see, our testimony as a church is directly related to our love for each other because this is the part that the world can see. When they see the love that the people of God have for each other, then they say, "why do the people of God love each other so much?" That is when we have the opportunity to tell them of our Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done in our heart.

These words of our Lord Jesus Christ put the matter beyond all doubt. You find that these are the things that we need to be paying attention to. I trust, this morning, that as you look in your own heart you see faith in the Lord Jesus and you see love unto all the saints. Paul speaks of this as something that is not just done initially and then forgotten, but this is something that characterizes the people of God. I trusted the Lord Jesus to save me to begin with and I continue to trust Him to guide me and to bless me and to lead me. You need to be doing the same thing.

Alright. Now let us look at the way Paul prayed for them. Look at the sixteenth verse. Here he says, "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

Notice first of all that Paul prayed for them. You know, it seems like the busiest servants of the Lord throughout history have been the men and women who have prayed the most. There is not a person here this morning who is any busier than the Apostle Paul was when he was here on earth. You think of what it means to travel from place to place. Of course, we travel in absolute luxury in our day compared with the way the Apostle Paul had to travel; but just think of how his schedule was continually upset. He just could not really order any day and expect that any two days would be alike. He would work in one place and then move on to another place. Sometimes his visits would be brief and sometimes they would be extended over a period of a few years. Yet, through all of his epistles, one impression that you come away with when you are trying to get acquainted with Paul himself was that he was a man of prayer--a man of prayer--a man who must have spent much time in prayer. Perhaps a lot of his praying was done as he rode some animal down the road or as he walked down the road, moving from place to place, or as he was traveling on a ship. It does not mean that he was necessarily alone. He does mention times when he bowed his knee and remembered the people of God in prayer. I want to impress upon you, this morning, if I may, how important it is for us to be praying, praying for people, the people of God around the world, the work of God around the world. If it were important for Paul to pray for the Lord's people in the first century, then it is certainly just as important for us to be praying for the Lord's people in the twentieth century. As I mentioned, it seems that all it took to get Paul praying for a certain group of people was just to hear that there was real evidence that they had come to know the Lord as Saviour, "I have heard of your faith and the love which you have to all the saints." So the first thing that he did in connection with the people of God was to give thanks for them.

Now. To whom do we give thanks? Well, you say, "that is an easy question to answer. We give thanks to God." Well now, why would Paul give thanks to God in the case of the Ephesians?

I wish all of you had been here to hear our Sunday School lesson this morning because it was excellent preparation for these things that we are seeing in these two verses just now. Many times we give credit to people because they have accepted Christ: "Why you have made a wonderful decision, you have really figured things out. I just wish that other people were as smart as you in

seeing their need and would turn to Jesus Christ." We feel that a person's destiny really is left entirely up to them, do we not? We do not know, many of us, the truth that Paul has been discussing here in the Book of Ephesians: chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestined to sonship, that His decree is decreed of God that we would be members of His family. We see that when you look at salvation and see it as it is taught in the Word of God, you do not start with men, you start with God. Salvation is not a work of man, salvation is a divine work. So when Paul said, "When I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, I knew that God had done something in your lives and my heart has been lifted up in thanksgiving to Him for what He has done in your lives." You do not get the credit. I do not get any credit. If it had been left up to me, I would not be a Christian. If God had not worked in my heart, I would not be saved. I would never have sought Him. You see, my salvation and your salvation is the outworking of His purposes, planned before the foundation of the world so that as you see people coming to Christ, you see God is continuing to carry on His work. Consequently, all thanksgiving belongs to God. Paul did this, you will notice, without ceasing. That is, "every time I think of you I just thank God for what he has done in your lives. I am thankful for the way you turned from Diana to Christ, for the way in which you have turned from your sins to the Saviour and you have found in Him the One Who can cleanse you from your sin and forgive you of your sin." He is saying, "Always remember that when you turned it was God Who was working in your heart. He is the One Who turns you and to Him belongs all of the glory." In Ephesians chapter 2 he says, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (vv. 8-9). So when the glory for our salvation, when we consider the glory of our salvation and to Whom it belongs, it belongs only to God and to our dear Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Paul prayed for the Ephesians like he prayed for the Thessalonians. Here I am giving you a couple of my verses that I have given to you many, many times before. You remember that he says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, "We are bound (we have a duty) to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not thanks to the people; it is thanks to God for what God has done in their hearts. You know, it will do something in your own heart when you think of the people of God. You may see lots of faults. You look at me and you are going to see lots of faults because the Lord is not through with us. But you also know what we would be like if the Lord had not done anything in our hearts. Then you find real reason to give thanks to God. We give thanks, and when you give thanks to God for what He has done why it just draws your heart to the people of God more than ever.

Now. The other thing that he says is, "I make mention of you in my prayers." Is this different from giving thanks? I believe it is. I say this because Paul went on in verses 17 and 18 and 19 to tell them how he had been interceding for them, how he had been praying for them. We learn in that prayer in very specific terms what his burden was. We are going to be examining this prayer, as I have mentioned, in the weeks to come. It is not my purpose to do that this morning. As you look down just briefly through verses 18 and 19 and 20, you see the things that the Apostle Paul was praying for. This is a very wonderful prayer, is it not? Prayer for greater knowledge, prayer for greater spiritual understanding. He was praying that they would know God in a greater way. We never know as much about God or as much about His Word as we ought to know. I take my stand with the Apostle Paul this morning when he said, "We do not know anything the way we ought to know it." That is, every truth of Scripture I can know better and need to know better and can know better and must know better. Until I am taken to heaven I am going to need to grow in grace just as much as you are. Therefore, you see how Paul was pouring out his heart and laying before them the fact that they need to continue to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God and of His truth.

It is important to preach and it is important to teach and it is important for us that we ought to be and do what the Lord wants us to be and do; but, you know, there is going to be a very serious lack in our ministry if we do not pray for each other. A prayerless church is a church that is not going to be

experiencing the blessing even though the Word of God is being proclaimed. I think I would rather see us discontinue our Sunday evening service than to discontinue our Saturday morning prayer meeting. I trust that you are praying in your homes for this ministry, that we are holding up one another in prayer, beseeching God that He would bless us, and that as we gather together to hear the Word He would open our eyes to the truth. I need your prayers. It always blesses my own heart to hear people pray for me and to hear others say that they are praying for me. You need my prayers. I do pray regularly for you. We need to meet with each other at the throne of grace. But, you know, what blessings we miss because we do not pray more. Here in these two verses we see the life pattern of the Apostle Paul: delighted when he heard of their faith and of their love, yet moved by the Spirit of God in a special way without ceasing, first of all to give thanks to God for what He had done and then interceding for them on behalf of those things that still needed to be done in their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

May I close this morning with a three-fold appeal? May I first ask you to make sure that you know the Lord--that these primary characteristics of a child of God are in your heart, are in your life? Then, secondly, it is going to help you to pray for other people if you look for these characteristics in other people's lives. Look for them in the lives of your children. Children, look for them in the lives of your parents. Let us look for them in one another's lives--not in a judgmental way, but, you know, that we might be able to minister more effectively to each other. I just pray continually that nobody will be able to sit under the ministry here at Trinity Bible church, whether I am speaking or somebody else is speaking, that nobody will be able to sit continuously under this ministry without being saved. I believe God can bless us that way, that when we gather in the presence of the Lord our families are going to be there. We will be gathered together. Yet, as I look back over my ministry I can see times when I have ministered week after week and month after month and year after year to people who sat and listened yet today their lives do not give any evidence that the truth of God ever got into their hearts.

The third, and last, thing that I am going to ask you to do is to pray. If you have been praying, I hope you will give yourself to greater prayer. Be faithful in prayer. Only the Lord can keep us faithful. I am sure that if you start to pray for somebody that you have not been praying for you are going to experience every possible obstacle to keep you from it. Perhaps things will happen in that person's life that will make you feel, "you know, it would be better if I never had prayed for them." Yet we know from the Word of God that this is what we need to be doing. Pray not just as we are accustomed to pray about the temporal matters and the physical matters--let us bring those to the Lord too because the Lord is concerned about those things--but, you see, we need to pray about the things that Paul was praying about. Pray that the truth of God would get into the hearts of the people of God because when the truth of God gets into our hearts you do not really have to be too concerned about how a person is going to live. The reason we are not living the way the Lord wants us to live is because we understand so little of the truth and it has not become a reality in our heart. Pray as the Word is being taught that God will open hearts, that people will be receptive, that His purposes will be accomplished. If we follow the pattern of the Apostle Paul, we are not only going to be enriched in our own lives, but we are sure to see the blessing of God in the lives of others, in the lives of those for whom we continue to give thanks and to mention in our prayers.