

EPHESIANS 1:15-16
The Wonderful Work of Salvation
Message 24, October 17, 1999

INTRO: We have taken much time in Ephesians 1:3-14. This is one long sentence. But immediately following this is another long sentence, Ephesians 1:15-2:10. The former sentence has dealt with God, the source of salvation. We learned of such topics as election and predestination and other blessings we have in Him. But the attention now moves to Paul in verse 15. And in the end of the sentence which is before us attention will be drawn to the Ephesian believers and thus to us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having spoken of the great Savior and His salvation and His bestowal of every blessing upon every believer Paul begins this next section with the word "therefore." In verses 15-16 Paul will speak of his thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers after he has heard of their faith and their love for all the brethren.

Now you may say, "Pastor Phil, this letter is too deep for me theologically. I cannot follow the thinking of Paul as it is expressed in these complicated sentences." Permit me to quote from D. Martin Lloyd Jones here. He writes, "We must never forget that this is a pastoral letter, and that its purpose was thoroughly practical. The Apostle must not be thought of as a theologian who sits down to write a theological disquisition; his object was to help Christians, to strengthen them and to encourage them in their daily Christian living. This is the apostolic way of doing so; the Apostle believed that the best way to help Christians is to teach them the great doctrines of the Faith and then to apply the doctrine to them."

Well, Paul will teach us and stretch us while he does so. When I consider present Christianity; our study books, our various writings, our interests and present day preaching, and who is popular as writer or preacher and who is not, when I consider this I wonder how much lower shall we sink yet. It is time that we as Christians engage our minds and do what is required to benefit deeply from the Word of God.

And so this morning we begin looking at the longest sentence in the Bible. We titled 1:3:21, The Wonderful Work of Salvation. In this first of two major sections of this

letter we will be looking at three main thoughts. We have considered the first in 1:3-14 as *The Blessed Source of This Salvation*. In 1:15-2:10 we will look at, *The Thankful Messenger of this salvation*. Then in 2:11-22 we will look at, *The Timely Reminder Regarding This Salvation*.

B. The Thankful Messenger of This Salvation (1:15-2:10)
Paul - The Messenger of Salvation

1. The information re: his thanksgiving (1:15-16)

a. The time of his thanksgiving (1:15)

Now the apostle Paul is a man of thanksgiving and he says his thanksgiving is ceaseless. But, though it is ceaseless, it had a beginning and the text gives us that beginning with regard to his thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers. It all began when he heard of:

-Their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul had spent some time at Ephesus and now he has been gone from them for some time and reports have it that the Ephesian believers are continuing strong in the faith. This is the first thing Paul mentions. Oh, here is a secret for Christian victory: continuing strong in the faith. I ask you this morning: If someone who observed your life several years ago should hear reports of you now what would he hear? Would that person hear that you are continuing strong in the faith? Or would he hear that you are slipping back? Would the report be that you are not really going anywhere? Oh, might it be a report like something like this: "Recently I talked to your old friend. He/she is strong in the faith."

-Their love for all the saints

But notice that the second thing Paul has heard about them is their love for all the saints. Well now that is big. I can understand if they had love for the saints but love for all the saints? I tell you here is a test of the Christian life. When I look at this topic and

look back at my own life I can say God has brought me a long way but I freely admit that I have a long way to go. Recently when I was teaching at CSB I forewarned the students who were looking at full-time Christian service and I told them that this area of love for all the saints would be the most tried area of all. In Christian ministry the biggest test is not how much I love the people I am seeking to minister to, but can I love those I minister with?

Someone has well said, "To live above with saints we love, that will be glory; But to dwell below with saints we know, well that's a different story."

Jesus spoke these powerful words in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." He had explained in John 13:34 what He was talking about. He told them that He was giving them a new commandment. This new commandment went beyond the old commandment. The old said we should love our neighbor as ourselves. The new said, "Love your neighbor as I have loved you." Where there is love among the members and towards all the saints, there all is well.

We find in this passage two reasons why the Church of Ephesus was a successful church at this time. They had a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and had a great love for all the saints. Here are two things that make for a blessed life: Faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints. Let me ask you, how is it with regard to your love for all the saints? Not only those out on the mission field but those in TEC? Or those in the EFC? Or those in the EMC? Is this not a test that goes to the very heart? It is for me. O Lord, I love; help the my unlovingness!

When one reads the Bible through one finds a sad warning regarding this passage. Let us pay the Church of Ephesus a visit some 30-40 years later (Rev. 2:1-7). In Ephesians 1:15 Paul speaks of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for

all the saints. My Bible gives this appropriate title to Revelation 2:1-7, "The Loveless Church." The sad commentary is that Ephesus had left their first love. Their love for the Lord Jesus had greatly diminished.

That leads us to ask first a personal question: How is my spiritual life now in comparison to when I first came to Christ? Then secondly, we must ask regarding TEC. What is the spiritual caliber of this church in comparison to 15 years ago, when it began? Now let me ask you a bigger question. You see, the Ephesian church in Revelation 2 is some 30-40 years old. It was there for several hundred more years. But in Revelation 2 it has many second generation Christians. I think that possibly the biggest test of our Christianity is not our own generation but the next generation. That generation is sitting with us this morning. I ask you moms and dads, when you look at this generation what do you see? Do you see a generation that will be stronger than the present generation? Here is the challenge I leave us first generation folk with: Let us prepare a generation that will be able to push far ahead of where we are. Let us not settle for simply keeping them with us, let us encourage them onward and upward.

Well, we have seen the time of his thanksgiving. It began after he heard of their continued faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints. Now let us consider the context of this thanksgiving.

b. The people of his thanksgiving (1:16b)

In verse 16 Paul says that he does not cease to give thanks for them, the Ephesian believers. I wonder what kind of system the Apostle Paul used to remember what he all wanted to pray about and what he wanted to give thanks for. Did these things come to his mind automatically or did he write them down? The Ephesians certainly were not the only people he prayed for.

I would like to make a suggestion to you. Make up some kind of system for prayer. I know that my memory is short and needs reminders. Permit me to give you a suggestion. Divide your week up into the days you want to pray for specific requests, say Monday through Friday. These prayer times do not do away with your other prayer times such as morning or evening but are additional. You could do something like this: Monday - family items. Each family member and concerns for them. Tuesday - church and special concerns. Wednesday - Neighbors. Thursday - country. Friday - personal concerns. Now you may begin with something and then modify it as you go along. Let us say your prayer time begins by only taking 2 minutes to cover. That is OK. It's better than no minutes. And then as you go along it will become longer and longer.

I do not know if Paul had a system or if his memory was sufficient to remind him of everything. I do know that I need a system. And when you begin a system it can grow as the needs grow.

c. The context of his thanksgiving (1:16a)

Paul's thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers is in the context of prayer. It is apparent from Paul's letters that he was a man of prayer. And when he comes in his prayer list to the Ephesians he gives thanks for them. He has two major things he is thankful for: Their faith in Jesus Christ and their love for all the saints.

Let us each ask ourselves another question this morning: How is prayer life? I understand that the earliest African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in their private devotions and prayer. Reports say that each one had their own spot in the forest or thickets where they would pour out their heart to God. These paths became well worn by regular use. And so it happened that when a believer slacked in their private prayer life it became apparent to others because the grass soon began to cover the

path. Someone who cared would then kindly remind him, "Brother, the grass grows on your path."

How is my devotional path? Or is there even one there? You see, the context of Paul's thanksgiving is that of prayer. I think that he must have spent much time in prayer and that his prayer was regular.

CONCL: In conclusion, let me ask a number of practical questions that this text raises for us. First, when you look back over your life how is it with your faith in the Lord Jesus in comparison to when you began? Is it growing? Is it lagging? Then with regard to your love for other Christians, how is it? Maybe, if you and I have only negative things to say about Christians, may it perchance be that the problem lies in us? Is there actually a true love for all the saints within us? Thirdly, how about my prayer life? Do I have a consistent prayer life and a consistency of the things I pray for? I ordered memory verses and packets for our Basic Bible Doctrine Sunday School class. The material came from the Navigators. Included was a little brochure with this little blurb on the front: "Bad habits are easy to form but hard to live with... Good habits are hard to form but easy to live with." Well, a consistent prayer habit is a hard one to form but it is easy to live with.

DID YOU THINK TO PRAY?

Ere you left your room this morning,
Did you think to pray?
In the name of Christ our Savior,
Did you sue for loving favor,
As a shield today?

When you met with great temptation,
Did you think to pray?
By His dying love and merit,
Did you claim the Holy Spirit,
As your guide today?

When your heart was filled with anger,

Did you think to pray?
Did you plead for grace, my brother,
That you might forgive another
Who had crossed your way?

When sore trials came upon you,
Did you think to pray?
When your soul was bowed in sorrow,
Balm of Gilead did you borrow,
At the gates of day?

Oh how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day:
So in sorrow and in gladness,
Don't forget to pray.

Mrs. M.A. Kidder