

## EPHESIANS 1:15-17

### INTRODUCTION

Paul spent two years in Ephesus preaching and teaching the gospel and God used him greatly for the establishment of his church there (Acts 19). He would have got to know the believers fairly well during his stay there, but Paul eventually left Ephesus to minister elsewhere but now he is in prison (3:1). However that does not mean that he is so taken up with his own problems and situation that he has forgotten about the people of Ephesus.

Nothing could be further from the truth for it seems that Paul had deliberately made attempts to keep in touch with what was going on in the church at Ephesus. He probably had regular visitors in prison and no doubt he asked about the believers in Ephesus. He asks about two things in particular, he asks about their faith, are they still pressing on are they strong in the Lord and he asked about their love for each other and for the saints in general.

Perhaps he asked about recent converts that is converts since his ministry among them. But the question is why does Paul only mention these two areas, why do these two areas convince him that he should continue to pray for them and that he should pray for these specific things mentioned in these verses? The answer is that these are the two basic and essential marks of true believers.

### 1. THE MARKS OF A TRUE BELIEVER (v 15)

Paul does not ask so much about their belief, he does not ask what these Ephesians' believe but he asks specifically about their faith in the Lord Jesus. This is because you can believe all the right things about God you can be clear concerning the doctrines of the bible and yet not exercise faith in the Lord Jesus. Paul is saying that he has heard that they are still trusting and believing in the Lord Jesus alone for salvation

Now of course this active type of faith does involve believing the right things as well as acting upon what we believe about Jesus. The term that Paul uses is very deliberate; he says faith in the Lord Jesus. That implies that they believe that Jesus is a real person, a man like all other men fully human, yet they also believe that he is more than a man but he is the Lord and therefore God.

Paul is saying that he has heard that these Ephesians' are believing in Jesus as the God/man who has come to save his people from their sin. But how does Paul know that this faith in the Lord Jesus is true and genuine. Well he knows this by his discovery about their love for their fellow believers. One of the marks of true faith is a true love for others. Jesus himself said that this is a true mark of Christianity (John 13:35).

We know we are actively believing in Jesus depending on him alone for salvation by our love for the saints and notice that it is not love for the saints that we get on with, those who we seem to gel with but it is love for 'all the saints' including those that we don't gel with, those that we don't agree with theologically and those that we don't see eye to eye with in the way that we work out our faith in everyday life.

We are to love those whose style of worship is different from ours or who emphasis is completely different from ours. True genuine faith in the Lord Jesus leads to true love for all the saints, which of course must be outwardly expressed to other believers. It's easy to say I do love all the saints and then spend most of our lives trying to avoid the ones that we don't get on with or don't gel with or don't see eye to eye with.

Love must be worked out practically in every day situations. So as Paul is in prison and asks those who visit him about the church at Ephesus he asks about their faith in the Lord Jesus, is it still strong and progressing and what about their love. Do they love each other and what about the Jewish Christians that they come into contact with? Do they love them too? The answer that Paul receives is very positive yes they are believing and they are loving.

Now those marks are marks for us as they were for the people of Ephesus. If you claim to be a Christian then are you daily trusting in the Lord Jesus to save you and trusting in him alone? If you are still trusting in your good works as well then the truth is that you do not have faith in the Lord Jesus. Do you believe that Jesus came into this world as a real man, that he was as human as you are? Do you believe that he was also God in human flesh?

Do you believe that he lived a sinless life because he knew no sin and do you believe that he died for your sin in your place so that you could be forgiven, justified and considered righteous by God? If you believe all that then that is good but it will not save you unless you come in true repentance and trust him to save you. Plead with him for mercy that he might show grace to you and turn you to God.

If you have been enabled by God to do that then are you everyday trusting in the Lord Jesus, relying on him as your Saviour and friend? If so then is there evidence that can be seen and verified by your active and practical love for others. Is there people in this church who could say yes I know that such and such a person loves me because and then give evidence by something you said or did for them. If so then would there be other Christians from a different church perhaps a church that totally worships differently from us and who although believing the gospel we believe in have a different emphasis than we do who could say that they have evidence of our love for them.

Well Paul and those who provided Paul with the information could clearly say that these Christians at Ephesus have an active faith in the Lord Jesus which is demonstrated by their love for all the saints.

## 2. PAUL'S RESPONSE TO GENUINE FAITH AND LOVE FOUND IN BELIEVERS (v 16)

What does Paul do with the information he has gathered? He no doubt remembered with fondness the Christians in Ephesus, he no doubt remembers specific people who were converted and he remembered the growth and excitement of new babes in Christ.

He remembered his hard work and the opposition that he faced as well and now that he is in prison and having managed to gain more information about the church he

responds to all that he has heard by praying for them. In his prayers he does two things:

a) He thanks God for them. (v 16) – He remembers these Ephesians with great fondness but he does not thank them for their faith and love but he thanks God for them.

Paul has his theology spot on. He knows that all that has happened to the Ephesians has happened not because these Ephesians were convinced by the gospel and decided to place their faith in Him but Paul knows that it was God who caused these Ephesians' to trust in the Lord Jesus and as a result a radical change was brought about in their lives and the evidence of that was that they began to love their fellow believers.

Paul knew that this was not man's work he knew that left to oneself no one will ever turn to the Lord Jesus no one will ever place their faith in him and no one would ever choose to love their fellow believers by themselves. No this was the work of God and so Paul thanks God for them. He no doubt thinks of specific people and thanks God for his work of grace in their hearts and as a result the love that is evident within that person's heart.

He no doubt thanked God for the way that he personally experienced their love in practical ways and so on. The lesson for us here is that as we see the faith of others in our Church and the love they have for their fellow believers then do we ever stop and thank God for them. Notice that this thankfulness was not a one off occasion when Paul prayed with thanksgiving but he says that he cannot stop giving thanks for them. He is simply amazed at what God has done in the life of these Ephesian people. Every time he thinks about them or hears about them he is filled with thankfulness for them. I have no doubt that Paul could think of specific Christians who had hurt him while he ministered for two years in Ephesians but that does not stop him giving thanks to God for them.

He was so thankful that God chose to show mercy to these people in Ephesus so that they placed their God given faith in the Lord Jesus and showed that faith through their love for all the saints including Paul himself. When we hear of an act of love in our own church, perhaps some kindness done by one Christian on another, and we come to hear about it, are we envious because that person does not seem to show us that love or are we genuinely thankful that God by his grace has caused that person to act in such generous ways to another brother or sister in Christ.

We need to learn to develop a thankful heart it does not come naturally to us, everyday we ought to ask the Lord to give us the grace to respond with a thankful heart for his grace to his people. Every act of kindness that we hear about done in the name of Christ ought to have us pausing and praising God for his grace in that person's life.

We can so easily take God's grace for granted, we can so easily get use to acts of love from fellow Christians that we take them for granted but we must learn to be thankful to God for showing his mercy and grace to such a person so that they are enabled to show love to their fellow Christians.

It is so easy to become negative towards one another that we always are complaining about this or that, but surely if we had a thankful heart then we would be much more positive about one another and Christ's church in general.

So let us this week learn to be thankful not just when we experience the love of our fellow Christians but when we see faith in action in any Christian of whichever denomination they belong too or of whatever theological persuasion they might come from.

**b) He prays for them (v 16-17)** – Obviously in thanking God for the Ephesians he was praying for them but he not only thanks God for them in prayer but he asks for specific things for them as well. Now we will not look at this prayer in detail this week but what I want us to notice is that he prays for them. The fact that the Ephesians were actively believing in the Lord Jesus and were demonstrating their faith in the Lord Jesus through their love for all the saints did not mean that Paul thought that they did not need prayer.

He did not give his attention to the unbelievers in Ephesus who have yet to come faith in the Lord Jesus, or he did not turn his attention in prayer to those who were struggling in their faith to those whose acts of love were not as clearly seen. No Paul knew the need that every believer has for prayer. Paul knew that even though there was much to commend these believers to Paul he knew that they needed prayer so that they will go on growing and maturing in their Christian faith.

Just as Paul did not stop thanking God for them he also did not stop praying for them, he keeps asking God to do certain things for them. Now just as we too are to learn to give thanks we also must learn to pray constantly for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must realise that everyone needs prayer and I know that we all know that; but has your prayer life has my prayer life reflected that truth this past week.

Have we only targeted in prayer those that we perceive to be struggling or those who have been poorly or live every day with pain and distress? Or have we constantly prayed for those that we perceive to be growing and going on well in their Christian walk with God. I must confess that I am at fault here as well. Often at our midweek I will give a list of people in need of prayer. On that list will consist of unbelievers and Christians who are in particular need of prayer because of ill health or some other difficulty.

Perhaps I ought to encourage us to pray for those who are physically well, those who are committed to the cause of the gospel and the church and those who seem to be going on well in the faith. Perhaps by my list of prayer request I have encouraged a wrong attitude in prayer that says that you only pray for those who have real needs. But Paul prays for those at Ephesus who are believing in the Lord Jesus and who are living out their faith in active love towards their fellow believers and no doubt others as well.

The point that we all need to grasp is how much we need prayer. Every day we are in need of prayer, every day we need our fellow believers to pray for us that his grace will be sufficient for that day. Every day we need to pray for all our fellow believers that they might grow in the faith and might increasing demonstrate their

faith by their love for one another. We will focus on this particular prayer next time but at the moment I want us to see one more thing before we finish.

**c) Paul's reasoning behind his praying (v 15) –** Paul starts of this section by saying “for this reason.” What reason is Paul talking about? Well we could say that the reason is that he has heard about their faith and love for all the saints and that is the reason behind his praying. These words could be referring to the rest of what Paul is about to say and pray but I think the words are a link between what he has already said and his prayer which is given to us in the rest of the chapter.

In other words the reasoning behind Paul's praying is that Paul is convinced that the truths that he has just been outlining in the opening 14 verses is the reason why these Ephesians have faith in the Lord Jesus and the reason why they express their faith in love. It is also the reason why he should pray for them. He is really praying, as we will see next time that all that they possess in Christ and all that they inherit in Christ will be increasingly realised in the lives of these Ephesian believers.

In other words Paul's praying is guided by his theological framework, what he actually believes is his reasoning when it comes to prayer. So for example the fact that they have been chosen in Christ and adopted into his family through redemption means that they have come to know God. So Paul prays that they might know God better (v 17) that they might fully realise what it means to be the elect of God and adopted into his family, redeemed etc.

The great lesson for us is to realise that what we believe will either be a help or a hindrance to prayer. If we believe these great truths, truths that we call doctrines of grace today then we will be encouraged to pray that our fellow believers will know God better.

We will know that they are secure in him and that their salvation depends on Christ alone but that will be our reason to pray that all God's people will come to understand the full implications of their salvation both in this world and the next. So what we believe is very important, it affects our praying and affects our reasoning as we pray and it affects the very things that we pray for.

Therefore we do need to know the great doctrines of the Bible we do need to ponder them and understand them and we do need to ask others to pray for us that we might not only understand the doctrines of grace but that we might also be able to apply these great truths within our lives. For these truths and the implications of these truths will help us to pray more effectively for others.

Therefore let us to diligent in our study of God's word in order that we may learn the truths of his word so that we may have hearts that are thankful to God. If we know these great biblical doctrines we will be people who pray for 'all the saints' and not just those that we perceive as being in need of our prayers at any given time.

Amen