

Thankful for your Faith and Love

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 1, and we may read again at verse 15.

Amen.

If I were to ask the question, what do you think is the most urgent need in our world today as Christians?

What would you say? How would you answer the question? I am quite sure that there would be many different responses.

But let me ask another question. Is there anyone present who considers that one factor takes precedence over every other?

[1 : 27] Does anyone share this view? Do we know that what is the most urgent need in our world today as Christians is to know God better and have a deeper understanding of who God is?

Do we reflect on what God is like? What He expects from us and what He seeks in us?

Are we taken up with the greatness of God, the holiness of God, the love of God?

In other words, is the God whom we seek to worship, is He the great God of the Bible or a God of our own fertile imagination?

Do we bow down before the real and true God? And do we consider that to have a knowledge of Him is the most pressing need of our generation and of our day?

[2 : 41] Because if that is true, then we will seek God Himself first and not the blessings which He confers.

And so prayer is important in that sphere. I think it was Robert McChain who used to say, where a man is alone on his knees before God, that He is and no more.

But let's probe a little more. Do we delight in praying? Not asking, is it easy to pray? But do we delight in prayer?

I think every Christian appreciates that prayer is never easy, at least persistent prayer. But do we delight in praying, in coming before God?

Do we have an awareness of meeting with the living God? That we are doing business with God when we come before His throne, interceding at the throne of grace.

[4 : 00] Let me ask another question. When was the last time that you came away from a period before the throne of grace, feeling like Jacob of old, that you had prevailed with God?

Be honest with yourself. When was the last time that you came away from the throne of grace and you felt that you had prevailed with God like Jacob of old?

Someone, in commenting on prayer, and I forget just now where I read it, prayer is the loftiest and most spiritual exercise of which we are capable as Christians.

I don't know whether you would agree with God. But this is the part that I liked of the quotation.

Prayer is having an audience with God.

Prayer is having an audience with God. Worshiping Him directly, asking of Him and receiving spiritual blessings in His presence.

[5 : 09] And that particularly appealed to me. Prayer is having an audience with God. When you consider who and what we are, sinners coming face to face with the Majestic God, a privilege that is bequeathed on the New Testament Church, that the Old Testament Church didn't have the liberty that is conferred on the New Testament Church, having an audience with God.

And you remember how Abraham described his situation in prayer. Behold, he says, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

And it's as if Abraham was overwhelmed at his own audacity, as one who was but dust and ashes and coming into the presence of the Majestic God.

Do we feel like that when we come before God? Well, prayer is important. Private prayer is important.

But, important as private prayer is, I am going to suggest that there is something about prayer in the company of fellow believers that can lift you to heaven and give you a heavenly mindedness towards one another.

[6 : 51] It's important that believers pray for one another. And it's humbling to know that you have been prayed for.

And it's a privilege to engage in prayer for fellow believers in the world. But it is also equally important that believers pray along with one another.

I remember once being in the company, they were old ministers, and I was just a young minister. They were probably no older than I am myself today, but in my eyes they looked very old.

And they were having a discussion about prayer. And one of them used the illustration, When I began my Christian life, my prayer circles, my prayers were like the circles, if you drop a stone, that's the illustration they used, a stone in a puddle of water.

And the circles where the stone has dropped are very close to one another. That's how my prayer life was at the beginning of my Christian life.

[8 : 16] My prayers were concerned more with myself. But as he matured in the life of faith, the prayer circles became wider until he said, My prayers began to go round the whole of the world.

Now this man, he was a most eloquent preacher. And if my memory serves me right, when he retired to his native village, he would go round every house in the village in his private devotions in prayer.

Praying for the families in the homes of that village. Prayer is important. It's vital to the Christian life. And because that is so, then we should give attention to the prayers that are set before us in the Bible.

Why? So that we too learn how to pray like the saints who are set before us in the Bible. The arguments they used before God.

The things they give priority to in their prayers. The truths that they used. And the Bible has many prayers.

[9 : 51] The book of Psalms in the lives of the saints in the Old Testament like the prophets, in the Gospels, and in the letters of the Apostle Paul.

In fact, the letters of the Apostle Paul are laced with prayer. And I think that is a reflection of the intensity of Paul's own spirituality as well as the demands that were laid upon him in the duties that were placed on him by the Lord.

In fact, the very first thing that we learn about Paul after his conversion is this, behold, he is praying. What a character reference that is given no less than by God himself. It's not a character reference that is given by the church, but a character reference that is given to the church by no less than God himself as God testifies to the spirit of prayer in the life of this man through the intervention of God in his life.

He is praying. And it seems to me that that sets the tone for the primary emphasis of the life of the apostle from then on.

[11 : 21] He would be known for much more, yes, but he would be known particularly as a man of prayer. And when you read his letters, you are given a taste of the cares and the burdens that left him so frequently and so industrious at the throne of grace.

To the church at Philippi, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always and every prayer of mine for you all.

And the language that he uses there is very similar to what we have in this prayer before us this evening. and the impression that is created in your mind is that his practice was to pray for those of whom he thought whenever he heard a bit of news or recalled a person or a church, he turned to the Lord on their behalf, thanking God for them and interceding for their well-being.

And it's little wonder then that he speaks of himself as praying constantly, writing to Timothy, I thank God as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

He encourages us in his letter to the Thessalonians, pray without ceasing. And many of the saints in the Bible are known for their prayer life.

[12 : 50] Moses, David, Hezekiah, Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, Paul himself. And of course the greatest example of all is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He regularly went off alone for periods of prayer. We read about Moses that he was with the Lord forty days and forty nights and the Bible goes on to relate he didn't know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God or that all the people were afraid to come near him. Such was the transformation that took place as a direct consequence of his converse with the Almighty.

Well, a little more closely at our text. First, the reason for thanksgiving. Secondly, to whom does he give thanks? And thirdly, his request for them.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints. At the time of writing this letter, Paul is a prisoner in Rome.

[14 : 08] He was a long way from the people of Ephesus. But the news is communicated to him about the effect of the power of the truth among the people there.

And that seems to me that it shows his continued interest in the ongoing work in Ephesus. who brought the news is not disclosed. We know that a period of time has lapsed since Paul preached there. We know from the book of Acts, the bond that existed between him and the church there.

For when the time of parting came, we are told, there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken that they would not see his face again.

But the news that is brought to him as a prisoner fills him with joy and thanksgiving. What is the cause of his joy and thanksgiving?

[15 : 21] Is it that the church in Ephesus has prospered? Is it that the church in Ephesus has grown rapidly in numbers? Is that the cause?

Is the cause that the church at Ephesus has adopted a radical program for evangelism? Is that the cause?

Or is the cause that their income has grown? Well, it may be that all of these things were true, but that is not the reason that the Bible sets before us for thanksgiving in the life of the apostle on behalf of this church.

He mentions two things, your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints. Now, when he says that he is giving thanks for these two particular things, he introduces it for this reason. where did this faith and love come from? It came from the sovereign action of a gracious God. And that is set before us in the early part of this chapter, where Paul has an outburst of praise.

[16 : 44] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. And he goes on to elaborate on the spiritual blessings, on election chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined in love to the adoption of sons, redeemed through the blood, and so on.

So, these blessings are the foundation of the faith and the love of which the apostle speaks here and for which he gives profound thanks unto the almighty for hearing of these things in the life of the church there.

So, the faith in the life of the church is important and you find that thing developed again and again throughout the Bible.

This is the victory that has overcome the world our faith. Without faith and love, there will be no prosperity in the life of the church in the world.

And you can see how the apostle places such emphasis on the necessity of saving faith and the grace of love in the life of the church.

[18 : 14] As he writes to the Colossians, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that you have for all the saints.

And writing to the Thessalonians, we ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

To Philemon, I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayer, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

So, it is evident that the apostle is placing great emphasis on these two factors. And did you notice what he wrote?

Your faith in the Lord Jesus. He didn't say your faith in Jesus Christ, or your faith in Christ, or your faith in Jesus, but your faith in the Lord Jesus.

[19 : 22] Why did you write it in that way? Would it not have been just as true, your faith in Christ, your faith in God's unknighthed one, your faith in Jesus, the one who is named Jesus because he saves his people from their sins, and so on?

Well, it seems to me that where he uses this language here, that he is setting before us, that it is faith in one who is God and man, your faith in the Lord Jesus, setting before us that this is the God man, the one who has come from above, the one who has been sent into the world with our divine mission from God in order that sinners might be saved.

The one who died the cursed death of the cross, the one who came into the very dust of death, who was buried and who rose again, the Lord Jesus.

As if the apostle is drawing our attention to this, that there is no salvation, out with the Lord Jesus. And it's not just that he writes of our faith in the Lord Jesus, but that our trust is placed emphatically in him, in what he has done in them.

You know, they are not trusting in the flesh, they are not trusting in anything that belongs to themselves. You know, I suppose I could say that the Ephesian Christians, although we are in the 21st century and they were a long way behind us, they were in an almost identical world situation.

[21 : 32] They lived in a pluralistic society. they lived in a culture where it was okay to believe in anything you wanted to believe as long as you didn't expect anyone else to believe that.

And these Ephesian Christians, they were standing out among their fellow men in the world because they were demonstrating real saving faith that always involves believing in the truth of God's word and believing in the person of Christ and believing that there is but one way of salvation, that there is one true God and that there is one Savior, Jesus Christ.

They weren't deviating from the teaching of the scriptures. They were standing up against the culture of practices of their day and they were demonstrating saving faith in God.

And the Apostle Paul was saying, I thank God that you Ephesian Christians have stayed with the Bible. You've stayed with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You've stayed with faith in the truth of God's word. And you are trusting in Christ alone for salvation and it's causing the Apostle to be filled with joy.

[23 : 00] And he doesn't stop there. He gives thanks too for your love toward all the saints. You notice what is written there.

Your love, he says, don't say your love toward the saints. That might be true. But he says your love toward all the saints.

Now remember, this congregation was made up of two particular groupings. There was a Jewish grouping and there was a Gentile grouping.

That could have caused huge clashes and huge differences of opinion. And so the little word all is very important in the context here.

the apostle doesn't say your love for the people that you like. Like your fellow Jew or your fellow Gentile.

[24 : 05] He doesn't say that. He says your love for all the saints. He doesn't say your love for those who may have the gifts that you have.

and not for the rest. He doesn't say that either. Your love for all the saints. Well, that should make us all think how do we possess that love?

Because it is of huge importance. And it seems to me that without this love that they wouldn't have true faith.

That seems to me what the apostle is implying here. If they didn't have this love for all the saints, then they didn't have true faith in Jesus Christ.

That makes you sit up, doesn't it? That really makes you sit up. Well, you have to examine your own life. If that love is missing out of your life, then you have to question what is the nature of the faith that you are professing.

[25 : 21] Because, remember how the apostle John lays emphasis on it. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another and God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

There is a story told, I don't know if I've told it already or not, about the father of Matthew Hendry. His name was Philip. And as a young man, he fell in love with a young woman and she belonged to a family whose status in society was much higher up the social strata than that of Philip Hendry. And her parents were most displeased at this liaison between their daughter and Philip Hendry. And they asked her one day, where does this man come from?

And the answer she gave was this, I don't know where he comes from, but I sure do know where he is going. Because he was in Christ.

[26 : 45] And she was quite emphatic about where his destination lay. Well, why did they love all the saints?

Could we not say that they loved all the saints because they were traveling the same road? They were all on the road to Zion.

They shared the same father, they belonged to the same family. people and so the apostle here is laying emphasis on this.

Now, I'm not saying that that is something easy, but that is what the truth is teaching. It's not the easy things that we have to pick out of the truth.

one of the Puritans, a man by the name of Richard Sibbes, said something like this, as we are knit to Christ by faith, so we must be knit to the communion of saints by love.

[28 : 03] I think there's a lot of truth on that. You see, if this is not true, because it seems to me the stakes are really high here.

At risk is the spiritual health of the church as well as its witness before the world. You remember what Christ said to the disciples, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. If you have love for one another. There is the qualifying phrase set before us.

So, it's no wonder that the apostle was giving thanks for this fruit in the lives of the church at Ephesus. Truth without love is not Christian truth.

Love without truth is not Christian love. The one without the other falsely represents God before the world.

[29 : 16] Both need to be held together so that the true God of the Bible is revealed before the watching world in our individual lives.

To whom does he give thanks? God has to be for this reason because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints I do not cease to give thanks for you remembering you and my prayers.

To whom does he give thanks? To God. The very God who in sovereign love and grace transformed their lives because without God they would never have begun to display the trust the faithfulness and the love that is now so richly displayed in their lives.

And you notice how the apostle has expressed it the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words the God of salvation the God that gave them everything that he speaks of in verses 3 to 14.

And then he uses that most expressive phrase the Father of glory as if God were the very foundation of glory the Father of glory it's the most suggestive term that is used there in the description that is given by the apostle.

[30 : 56] Well it is to him that thanks is to be given and I noticed my time was going and then his request for them what was their greatest need and that brings me back to where I began if we were to make a list because we live in a godless unbelieving culture what would be on our list perhaps we might say there is a great need for evangelism and apologetics there is a great need for sound biblical teaching and preaching a greater need for holiness for Christians to become involved in the politics locally and nationally and all of these things perhaps true today and true then but look where Paul places the emphasis it is none of these things that I mentioned on which he places the emphasis but that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him in the knowledge of him in other words a better knowledge of God

Paul prays that these Christians these Christians who may as already indicated have been sealed by the Holy Spirit who have been given a saving knowledge of God and a close walking and communion with him these Christians who appreciate the sovereign redeeming love of God he prays that God will by the Holy Spirit give them a better knowledge of himself do Christians do they

know God or do they mean to know God and the apostles answer to these questions is this yes Christians know God but they need to know God even more they need to know God even more they need to know him better because the knowledge of God involves eternal life this is eternal life that they know you the only true

God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent that's at the heart and fulfillment of God's covenant purpose for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after these days declares the Lord I will put my law within them I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God they shall be my people no longer shall each one take his neighbor and each his brother say know the Lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord important then to know God to know God to have a better knowledge of God and surely that ought to be part of the prayer life of every believer in the world to have a deeper knowledge and a better knowledge of God I'm going to finish on this note by a young minister who once went to visit an elderly man who was coming to the end of life's journey and while the old man was speaking the young minister was amazed at his astonishing knowledge of the

Bible and his grasp of doctrine and ultimately he said to the old man where did you get such knowledge he said could you tell me what books you read what seminary or college did you attend and you know the reply he received my dear young man I learned these things on my knees on the mud floor of a little sod cottage with my open Bible before me I used to kneel for hours at a time and ask the Spirit of God to reveal Christ to my soul and to open the world to my heart he taught me more on my knees on that mud floor than I could ever have learned in all the seminaries colleges and colleges in the world where will we gain a deeper knowledge of God is it not by sitting at the feet of the Savior and it's so important because none of us can ever know too much about God and none of us in this life will ever know enough about him and the more we know of him the more we will love him the more we will praise him and the more we will be like him and do we not all feel the need to be like him to love the things that he loves to detest the things that he detests to bear witness of him it is surely a good prayer for us to pray for one another this evening this week every week it's a prayer that doesn't let you stay the same way because as you begin to know [36 : 47] God more everything but everything changes the reason for thanksgiving the faith and love that was evident in the heart of the believers at Ephesus to whom does he give thanks to almighty God the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ what is a request for them greater knowledge of God because greater knowledge of God will influence your life and will transform it as you go forward may God bless to us these thoughts on his truth you