

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1

“15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

“How Do We Know We are Christians?”

Well it is time for us to move on from the introduction! As we do, please remember that the Apostle begins verse 15 with that very important word, ‘therefore!’ As I pointed out in our conclusion last week we are to take in all the truth he has expressed or revealed from verse three to verse fourteen and have it in mind as Paul continues with his thanks and prayers for these Saints.

Lord willing, this week we are going to focus on verse 15 and then next week I will discuss the subject of prayer in general before we consider the specifics of how the Apostle prays for these Saints at Ephesus.

With that grand introduction in mind, the Apostle now provides the answer to an important question which I have in the sermon title, an important question we should all be able to confidently answer in the right way & one that bring us real comfort for our lives.

➤ How do we know that we are Christians?

This is an important and very practical question which is why the Apostle gives us the proper basis to answer it right after that introduction. Pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones puts it this way: “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;... [yes, I had to look disquisition up and it means a long or elaborate essay or discussion on a particular subject]

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 Apostles believed that the best way to help Christians is to teach them the great doctrines of the Faith & then to apply the doctrine to them.”

So, what is the practical application here in verse 15 when the Apostle writes, “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints...”

The Apostle Paul is going to confidently pray for these people at Ephesus as Saints, as Christians...

➤ So, why can he do so?

He can do so because he knows two things about them: They have put their faith in the Lord Jesus and they have love for the Saints.

These two things are what we should see as the ‘acid test’ whenever it comes to judging our own standing or the standing of others before God.

➤ One refers to what we believe and the other refers to what we practice.

The Apostle knows that they have put their faith in the Lord Jesus, Whom he mentions seven times just here at the beginning! We cannot simply use the name Jesus and give it any meaning that we want, but we must believe and put our faith in the Lord Jesus!

The best example of this comes near the end of the Gospel according to John when he shares a powerful example and summarizes his reason for penning that work.

We should all know the account of Thomas who was otherwise occupied when Jesus first appeared to the Disciples on the evening of His resurrection. Thomas is skeptical of their account and thus has been known as doubting Thomas for almost two thousand years... Which is sort of sad since he is given as a good example of true faith.

When Jesus returns the next week we read at verse 27: “Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side.

Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Thomas has now put his faith in the Lord Jesus and then the Apostle John reminds us all that we should do the same: “30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

- **Here it is important to remember that it is the object of our faith and believing that is important and not the strength of our will or depth of our knowledge.**

Thomas and the other disciples had a ton of head knowledge and even experiences, having walked with Jesus for over three years! And yet it is only now that they have come to truly know Who Jesus was: The Christ, the Son of God and put their trust fully in Him.

At nearly the same time, we are given the example of the thief on the cross, who likely knew very little about the ministry of Jesus and yet put his faith in Him as the Lord Jesus at the end of his life.

However, the Apostle Paul did not have the confidence to pray for these Saints solely because of what they believed, but also because of how they lived...

“15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...”

He knew of their love for the Saints which is the other part of our test when it comes to answering that all important question:

- **How do we know we are Christians!**

We again see this most clearly in the Gospel account from the Apostle John who gave us the extended look at the final instructions, admonitions and prayers from Jesus on the night of the Last Supper.

I would commend that entire discourse to your further study but for this morning I want to focus on a theme that runs throughout chapter 14 where Jesus begins with faith...

“14 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me... and again in verse 6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

- **Our salvation is by faith alone through Christ alone!**

Then beginning in verse 15 we see the other half of the test...

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth,

19 “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. 20 At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” ... “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.”

➤ So what we believe is important and what we do is important.

Some of you might remember those sermons from James many long years ago [*and they are on line if you do not*]. When we came to his statement that faith without works is dead, I pointed out that in today’s reformed world you can get in trouble for even mentioning faith and works in the same sentence!

It is important to point out that just because there have been many problems down through the ages with works-based salvation, we should not fear to go where the Bible goes! In that message long ago I made the case that the faith James spoke of was the same saving faith that Paul proclaimed AND that the faithful works that James stressed were also the faithful works that Paul admonished the Saints to engage in.

➤ We do NOT lose the truth nor the importance of being saved by faith alone by also teaching that those who now have Jesus as their Savior serve Him as their Lord.

As evidence for this we can turn to the Book where the Apostle Paul pleaded with those who toyed with a works-based gospel, a gospel that Paul said was accursed. That book of course is Galatians which leaves no doubt about salvation by faith alone, and yet here is what we find in chapter six:

Galatians 6: “7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Sound familiar? Yep it is just like our text: “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints”

Now we are given many examples of this two-fold test and can see it clearly demonstrated in one of the few places where we find the term Christian in the New Testament. [mention Saint or the Way]

Acts 11: “23 When [Barnabas came to Antioch] and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. [*they were saved and knew the Lord Jesus!*] 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. 27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. [*they had love for the Saints!*]

The Bible gives us many ways to understand this two-fold truth, and they are always in proper balance...

Here we have Faith and love

In James we saw Belief and action

In Romans we have Doctrine and life

Jesus would speak of Truth and love

The test of whether we are Christians requires both components because there are severe warnings about having one without the other! We saw this clearly in our study of James where at 2:26 we read:

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

James there gives a clear answer to the question he raised in verse 14: Can dead faith save a person?

James declares that faith without works is dead in the same way that the body is dead without the spirit!

- **Some today, are not comfortable with his straightforward answer.**

We must not allow our modern dualisms, rationalisms or pietism to confuse what James says here: Absent breath, the body is dead & absent works, your faith is dead.

- **This is exactly what Jesus means when He says that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments.**

And of course the warnings cut the other way as well: Doing lots of good works with no faith will not gain you eternal life.

Remember those chilling words of Jesus in the sermon of the Mount after he warned them to beware of false prophets, those who do NOT have their faith in the Lord Jesus:

“21 ‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

And the Apostle Paul could not have been more clear when warning the Saints at Galatia: “3 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”

So we have two great truths that we AND others should be able to see in our lives: Our faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for the Saints! They must be kept in the proper order and in proper balance...

- **But if we lack either we cannot answer that all important question in the affirmative.**

Again, as we discussed last week, none of us is perfect: We are not perfect in our faith nor our practice, but the question is where are we headed and we are not left without a road map:

- **We have the Word of God to guide our faith and our life AND we have the Life and ministry of Jesus as the greatest example of how we are to love God and our neighbor!**

There are many other good examples, like those listed in Hebrews 11, but Jesus is our perfect example!

And before we all go forth to begin our career as a fruit inspector, please remember the cautions that we are given: Jesus said to be sure the LOG is taken from your own eye before dealing with a brother’s splinter. He also said, do not judge, lest you be judged which means that we are willing to use the same standard for our lives that we use to judge others.

- **James reminded us that we have the Law of liberty that sets people free and not one that puts them back under bondage.**

And also remember that we often do not have the whole picture: I suspect we would have been pretty tough on Thomas if we had discussed things with him between those two appearances of Jesus. If we had given the final meal to that thief on the cross while he was still in the prison, I suspect we would have thought there was NO hope for him.

With all of those cautions given the question of whether we can know we are Christians is crucial to us and to the world. We want to live in the assurance that we are God's people and the world should respond as those pagans in Antioch did by seeing us as followings of Jesus: Those Christians.

As William Wilberforce rightly asked in his book *Real Christianity*, 'if you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you.'

In closing I will let two who are far wiser than I speak to the importance of the order and the reality of these truths in our lives. As I have often said, I am drawing much of this from Pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones and here is what he concluded:

"Those are the two acid tests of any profession of Christianity that we can apply to one another. Let us remember the order in which the Apostle places them. He does not put 'love to all the saints' before 'faith in the Lord Jesus.' This, however, is being done today on a large scale.

We are told 'not to bother about definitions,' that theology does not matter, that what a man believes is irrelevant, that we must love all who claim to be Christians. But that is not the Apostolic order. The Apostle Paul was never interested in vague sentimentality. 'Faith in the Lord Jesus' must be first; then, and only then, but definitely then, 'love unto all the saints.' And no man is a saint unless he has faith in the Lord Jesus. Place them in the right order, keep them in the right order, and then insist upon both. The first commandment to the Christian is not that we should love one another but that we should believe in the Lord Jesus. We are told about the early disciples that they 'continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers.' Today the fellowship is put first, and the doctrine is almost regarded as a present parlous condition. She has departed from the Apostolic order – faith in the Lord Jesus first, doctrine first; and then 'love toward all the Saints.'"

And of course it is right doctrine and love for the Saints that we often see the Apostle Paul stressing as he does in

Colossians 3:12 "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

So how do we know that we are Christians? We are Christians because we have put our trust in the Lord Jesus and have love for His Saints, and Lord willing here at Church of the King we will continue to be RICH in faith and produce much good fruit!

Communion Meditation: John 10

"7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came [a]before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture....

25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, [e]as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.""