

Spiritually Supporting Each Other

Ephesians 1:15-16

Throughout Christian history it has been considered to be one of the most influential books in the NT

- Cf. Psalms, The Gospel of John and Romans
- Much shorter
- Punchy and potent
- It is a concise work about Christ and the gospel, about life with God's spirit and about the right way to live

It is, of course, about Jesus... but it is also about us

- “It is about *us*. It describes human beings, their predicament, sin, and delusion, but much more it describes God's reaching out to people to recreate and transform them into a new society. Most of the letter is about two subjects: *power and identity*. It describes the power God's Spirit gives for living. It shows who we really are without Christ and who we become both individually and corporately with Christ. It is about how we understand ourselves and how we can get along with each other and God.” –Kyle Snodgrass¹

Hence, it is one of the most **important documents** in the NT for understanding the church

- The supremacy of Christ over and in it
- The reality of living together as members of it
- Our interconnectedness in Christ
- Ephesians goes far in telling us how to be the church
- It tells us who we are, who God is, and what to do

Paul had planted this church in Ephesus in ...

- Paul spent over 2 years in Ephesus and so had a deep connection with them
- See [Acts 19-20](#) for some of the story

Now its some years later and Paul is writing them during one of his **imprisonments** (Cf. [6:20](#))

- He would have known some people in the church, from his time there, and others he would not have known

But he has heard reports about them... good reports that cause him to give thanks to God

¹⁵Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, ¹⁶I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly,

It wasn't uncommon for Paul to give thanx for churches that he wrote to—**he loved the church**

No matter how bad a church was, Paul thanked God for them

- Exception = Galatians (NO THANK!)
- Romans 1:8 (for their faith being proclaimed throughout the world)
- 1 Corinthians 1:4 (for grace given them)
- Philippians 1:3-4 (for their participation in the spread of the gospel)
- Colossians 1:3-5 (same as Ephesians—their faith in Jesus and their love for all of God's people)
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (for their faithful work, loving deeds, and enduring hope)

¹ Kyle Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary—Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI.: 1996), 17.

- 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (because their faith was flourishing and their love for one another was growing)
- Here in Ephesians, Paul is thanking God for (v. 15) their **faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for God's people everywhere**
 - There is this common theme with the churches in Thessalonica, Colossae and Ephesus
 - They had a strong or flourishing **faith** in Jesus coupled with a **love** for all of God's people
 - **Faith and love** (and hope—v. 18) the Trilogy (Cf. grace and truth)
 - These paired together make true, faithful Christianity
 - That is why Paul says, “**I have not stopped thanking God for you...**”

What is **faith in the Lord Jesus**?

- Saving faith versus the **strong faith** mentioned here
- **Relying on His provision and living for His glory in the midst of a sinful and self-serving culture.** –Bryan Chapell²
- The culture in Ephesus was much like ours
 - There was affluence; commercialism; deep pagan influence
- Living with faith in Jesus was a daily challenge
- Faith = trust
 - Trusting Jesus in every aspect of life
 - Ours standing before God; understanding of self; dealing with life; dealing with people

What is **love**?

- The word love appears more times in the Epistle to the Ephesians than any of Paul's other letters except for 1 Corinthians (which is of course much longer and includes the famous love chapter) (Only 1 John outdoes Ephesians)
- The corresponding verb “**to love**” is found in Ephesians more than any other letter
- **Agape: A thoughtful, volitional, purposeful love that wills to love even the unlovely—the very love of God Himself!**³

Their love for others was not confined to their immediate circles but it was broad

- (v. 15) **their love for God's people everywhere**
- “**A person wrapped up in his or her self makes a very small package**”
 - And it is not much bigger when it only extends to or organic, natural, immediate sphere
 - They loved “**God's people everywhere**”

Paul here is referring specifically to **God's people (saints)**

- Does not preclude love for non-Christians
 - CF. love neighbor/enemy/God loves the world

But Ephesians is largely about **our connection with Christ** and so **our interconnectedness** with one another

There should be a special love between Christians

- John 13:34-35
So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.
- Galatians 6:10
Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith

² Chapel, 61.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 50.

Our love for other Christians is not mushy, but it is formed by the Lordship of Christ

Love for other Christians is an **acid test** of true conversion

- I John 3:14
If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it **proves** that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.

Loving other Christians is a **commandment**

- The **enablement** is our strong faith in Christ
 - **1 John 4:7-12**
- If we are struggling with loving other Christians we need to return to Christ
- **Cf. The concert vision last week**

We may find it easy to love some of the **saints**, but it is never easy to love all of the **saints**

- 38,000 Christian denominations!!!
- Different doctrine
- Different styles/emphasis's /church cultures
 - Jonathan Swift (d. 1745), Irish author, satirist and clergyman. Wrote *Gulliver's Travels*
 - "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."
 - R. Kent Hughes
 - "Our surface Christianity arms us with what we think are proper prejudices and a rationale for criticizing those who fall short, keeping them at arm's length."⁴
- **The One Conference...**
 - **What binds us together as Christ followers is so much greater than anything that threatens to tear us apart**
 - **Difficult (38,000)**

Jesus prays in **John 17:20-23**

How we, as Reality, should represent Christ and His Kingdom...

This will always be a challenge

- They are doing it, but much of the rest of the book will be Paul exhorting them to overcome the barriers to love and unity
- Ephesians 4:3-5
Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

This brings out the point that Paul was thanking God for them **even though they were not perfect**

- He chose to deal with them according to grace and their identity in Christ (His righteousness) rather than their shortcomings
 - The approach was one of (1) who they are in Christ and (2) what they are doing well
 - Rather than not
- It doesn't mean he won't deal with their shortcomings, he does
 - But he also rejoices in their well doing

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 50.

This is one of the ways that we can **spiritually support each other**

- **Rejoice in and commend what fruit we do see in each other's lives by the work of the Holy Spirit**
 - Even though we know there is much growth needed
- We need to learn to commend
 - It takes no special skill or work of the Spirit to see what is wrong with people and criticize them
 - “To see people robed in righteousness not their own and to encourage them on this basis to be more of what they should be powerfully communicates the heart of Christ... We provide **spiritual support** by commending others for the good we can see despite the growth that they still need.”⁵

We need to learn to be and say, “**I am thankful for you**” (Cf. v. 6)

- **People can't grow in an environment where only their failings are seen and remembered**⁶

Paul was rejoicing that they were doing well spiritually

Do we have this sort of attitude? Rejoicing when others do well spiritually? Rejoicing when others are blessed?

- The truth is we often are jealous and displeased
 - Not new. Not merely a product of a **culture of competition and comparison** (One Conf. speakers)
 - It is a deep, timeless human flaw.
 - This is why Cain killed Abel
- St John of the Cross (San Juan del la Cruz) (d. 1591)
 - “**Many experience displeasure when they see others in possession of spiritual goods. They feel sensibly hurt because others surpass them on this road and they resent it when others are praised.**”⁷

Paul's attitude calls us upward. His heart is to be emulated.

- Loving them, commending them, rejoicing in them, praying for them
- = Spiritual support for others
- Just a word of commendation and pray can be life changing for others
- Assignment: Tangibly love, commend, rejoice in and pray for one Christian brother or sister this week

The value and power of prayer

- Changes circumstance—and it changes us
- Satan is afraid of the prayers of the saints (especially for each other)
- Spiritual support for others (so needed in this materialistic culture—rely on temporal)
- **Ephesians 6:18-20**
- Let's pray for **the blessing and the unity** of the church's in SB/Carp/VTA today)

⁵ Chapell, 62.

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⁷ As quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 50.